



MAINE ASSOCIATION OF CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYERS

P.O. Box 17642
Portland, ME 04112-8642
(207) 523-9869
mainemacdl@gmail.com

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Senator Pinny Beebe-Center, Chair
Representative Suzanne Salisbury, Chair
Committee on Criminal Justice & Public Safety
100 State House Station, Room 436
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 1364: An Act to Prevent Opioid Overdose Deaths by Establishing Safe Consumption Sites

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public:

MACDL submits this testimony in support of LD 1364. Thank you to Representative Lookner for sponsoring this desperately important legislation.

Over the past several years, Maine has lost thousands of people to our drug crisis. The deaths of these souls have left holes in the hearts and souls of countless Mainers. Their loved ones' lives will never be the same. No policy that has been implemented over the past several years has stemmed this wave of death and despair. This bill may do just that.

Expanding services does not mean much if people are still forced to use drugs in ways that are unsafe and hidden. When drug use is cloaked with fear and shame, this is a deadly combination.

This bill proposal would provide people who use drugs a place to go to get clean supplies, testing kits, and consume their previously-purchased drugs in a place where medical help is onsite and immediately available.

This bill, quite frankly, is one of the few proposals in this committee that would actually save lives as opposed to punishing and warehousing people who use drugs. We need to try something new. People are crying out for help and support. We cannot ignore those cries any longer.

The War on Drugs has been an unmitigated failure: drugs have won—we all have lost. And yet, we keep dumping billions upon billions of dollars into this war each and every year. The United States' prison population has ballooned to more than 2.3 million people. We cannot arrest and incarcerate our way out of this crisis.

Anyone who tells you that the War on Drugs has been at all successful or effective is not speaking from data or evidence or reason. Incarceration is enormously expensive. We are spending so much and getting so little. From a human standpoint, focused treatment and intervention for our clients would save lives and re-inject some dignity and humanity into their lives. Our clients—our neighbors, friends, and family members—deserve so much better than what we have provided to them. Meeting people where they are and giving them non-judgmental medical intervention and support is the only humane thing we can do at this point.

Public safety is improved when people who are struggling are linked to the services and treatment that will provide them relief. This bill is about harm reduction and recovery and saving lives. Locking up people who are in crisis only delays the inevitable: their symptoms worsen as a result of incarceration. Instead, intervention through secured access to treatment and support—which includes comprehensive treatment through medication and counseling—will help ensure a safer, healthier community moving forward.

We need to move past the moralistic view of substance abuse disorder as some sort of failure. Any one of us could be affected by substance abuse disorder. Too many of us already know and love people who are struggling mightily each day to ease their pain—be it psychic or physical—and stay alive. By giving people a safe place to use drugs, get medical support, and seek out treatment, we will be saving lives.

Thank you for your consideration, for your attention to this matter, and for allowing me to share with you all today on this important issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tina Heather Nadeau, Esq.
MACDL Executive Director