



Testimony of Maine Access Points

Presented by Maggie Zall

In Support Of

L.D. 1975

January 17, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Maggie Zall, and I am testifying on behalf of Maine Access Points' (MAP) Leadership Team in support of LD 1975, *An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs*. We extend our gratitude to Representative Lydia Crafts for sponsoring this important piece of legislation.

Maine Access Points is a harm reduction and public health program, providing statewide access to naloxone, overdose prevention and safe use supplies and education, wound care, drug checking, peer support and resource navigation, infectious disease testing, connection to care, and more throughout the state of Maine. MAP purchases and distributes **nearly half of the state's community naloxone supply** as one of four "Tier One" distributors in the Maine Naloxone Distribution Initiative (MNDI). Through this initiative, MAP is the only mail-order naloxone provider in the state, serving **all 16 counties**. MAP currently operates Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (MECDC)-certified syringe service programs in Oxford, Washington, and York counties, with brick-and-mortar locations in Rumford, Machias, and Sanford. In this role, we are keenly aware of the positive impact LD 1975 would have on people across the state of Maine and particularly in our rural communities where resources and support are scarce.

Criminalization of drug use and people who use drugs is a public health crisis. Why is it a public health crisis? Because the public response to drug use causes more individual and systemic harm than drug use in itself. Because the public response to drug use has never and will

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never stop the existence of drugs, and interdiction efforts have only made the drug supply more contaminated and unpredictable. No matter the driver for drug use—be it a substance use disorder and trauma, or simply personal choice and joy seeking—the response is the same. Criminalization causes harm regardless of whether an individual becomes abstinent from drugs as a result of said criminalization. No other situation involving the health and safety of an individual prescribes police interaction, surveillance, incarceration, disconnection from resources and community—and subsequent trauma—as a solution.

Drug use is morally neutral. However, the dominant response to drug use does not reflect this. For decades, this response has harmed and killed some of our dearest loved ones. It has drained our state and country of resources. It has pitted community members against one another. It has decreased our overall safety and well-being. It has failed.

We believe this bill is a step in the right direction. The creation of a fund to create and bolster critical, comprehensive services will only yield positive results, especially if it is coupled with a de-emphasis on law enforcement involvement in health-related situations and issues. We ask that you seriously consider this proposal and the ramifications of continuing what we have always done. While **an uncontaminated, predictable supply of drugs is desperately needed**, and while there are successful implementation models for safe supply, we believe that funding services and reducing harms associated with criminalization is an important first step in creating lasting and sustainable safety and health in our communities.

During this pandemic we have seen a rapid rise in both fatal and non-fatal overdoses due to a contaminated and unpredictable drug supply. While data may suggest stabilization as the result of our collective efforts, we are here to share that the loss is as profound as ever, and our despair runs deep. So does our hope, though.

This bill will allow many of our participants to continue accessing services and maintain connection to their communities without the compounded trauma that results from law enforcement interaction due to possession. It will allow them to stay in their communities. Moreover, when we can engage people in our programs with less threat of disconnection, we are able to build lasting relationships with them, connect them with the health and social supports they identify, and connect them with naloxone and overdose education, among other things. However, when an individual is at constant risk of arrest or incarceration, they are forced to confront impossible decisions, such as: “Do I risk criminalization and jail time to stay alive and

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healthy, or do I keep re-using the same dull syringe or a friend's broken pipe to avoid legal consequences?" and more. It does not have to be this way.

If it becomes law, this legislation will save lives. We implore you to stand on the side of justice and ensure the dignity and respect of all our neighbors in Maine. We respectfully ask you to vote "Ought To Pass" on LD 1975.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or if we can provide the committee with more information. We can be reached via email at info@maineaccesspoints.org