

March 17, 2025

Written Testimony of Katie Rutherford, Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center
**In Opposition of LD 219, An Act to Limit Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs
to a One-for-one Exchange**
Committee Health and Human Services

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Katie Rutherford and I'm the Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's largest community-based HIV/AIDS services organization. I am writing on behalf of the agency in opposition of LD 219 which would limit access to harm reduction services by restricting syringe exchange to a 1:1 model.

Harm reduction programs play a critical role in public health. Significant [studies](#)¹ and [local medical experts in the field highlight](#)² the importance of these services in going far beyond the exchange of safe use supplies – they provide critical healthcare including wound care, overdose prevention tools, low-barrier testing and a supportive pathway to recovery. Limiting exchange to 1:1 has led to increased infection rates, negative health outcomes and results in financial stress on the healthcare system.

Additionally, we are currently facing and responding to a growing HIV outbreak in Bangor among people who use injection drugs. We are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic which halted community-based testing services, leaving a years-long gap in potential diagnosis and linkage to care. We need to make sure that people have broad access to safe use supplies to prevent infectious disease transmission. Implementing policies that do not follow science at this crucial moment will open the door for a sharp growth in HIV and Hepatitis C infection rates.

We have seen first-hand the life-saving success and positive health outcomes that result from quality syringe exchange services. Just days ago, the success of the City of Portland's Syringe Buyback program was highlighted in the [Portland Press Herald](#)³, which follows a 1:100 exchange model. Funded by opioid settlement funding, this program is exceeding expectations in rates of returned syringes and supporting the health and well-being of communities. It is important we continue to work together with communities and public health professionals to ensure the strategies we are implementing contribute to long-term benefits for the whole community, and not opening the door for further disease transmission. We urge you to vote no on LD 219.

1. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2562866/#S15>
2. <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/09/14/opinion-needle-exchanges-save-lives/>
3. <https://www.pressherald.com/2025/03/13/portland-reports-significant-success-in-needle-buy-back-program/>