



**TESTIMONY OF GLBTQ LEGAL ADVOCATES & DEFENDERS  
IN OPPOSITION TO  
LD 219, AN ACT TO LIMIT HYPODERMIC APPARATUS EXCHANGE PROGRAMS  
TO A ONE-FOR-ONE EXCHANGE  
Committee on Health and Human Services  
March 17, 2025**

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

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law) is a nonprofit legal organization that works in New England and nationally to create a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation. We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony in opposition to LD 219, An Act to Limit Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs to a One-for-One Exchange.

GLAD Law has long supported and participated in efforts to end the HIV epidemic. Syringe exchange programs are an important piece of those efforts. Indeed, according to the Centers for Disease Control, nearly 30 years of research has shown such programs to be safe, effective, and cost-saving interventions that reduce the transmission of HIV, viral hepatitis, and other infections.<sup>1</sup> However, programs with limits on syringe distribution – such as a one-for-one exchange limit – are less effective than programs without those limits at reducing the number of people reusing syringes.<sup>2</sup>

Despite many advances in preventing and treating HIV, Maine currently faces a public health crisis. There is an outbreak of HIV in Penobscot County, with cases anticipated to continue rising.<sup>3</sup> And 2020 data showed Maine as having the highest rate of new hepatitis C cases and second highest rate of hepatitis B cases in the country.<sup>4</sup> Particularly in light of these circumstances, it is critical that the State permit best practices for syringe exchange programs.

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<sup>1</sup> *Safety and Effectiveness of Syringe Services Programs*, CDC (Feb. 8, 2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/syringe-services-programs/php/safety-effectiveness.html#:~:text=Nearly%2030%20years%20of%20research,and%20other%20infections1112>.

<sup>2</sup> *Syringe Distribution Programs Can Improve Public Health During the Opioid Overdose Crisis*, Pew, (Mar. 2, 2021), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2021/03/syringe-distribution-programs-can-improve-public-health-during-the-opioid-overdose-crisis>.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen O'Brien, *HIV cases in Penobscot County will keep rising, health official fears*, Bangor Daily News, (Mar. 5, 2025), <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2025/03/05/bangor/bangor-health/hiv-cases-penobscot-county-continue-rising-health-official-fears-joam40zk0w/>.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Russell, *Maine has nation's highest rate of hepatitis C, 2nd-highest rate of hepatitis B*, Portland Press Herald, (May 26, 2023), <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/05/25/maine-has-nations-highest-rate-of-hepatitis-c-2nd-highest-rate-of-hepatitis-b/>.

By creating a one-to-one limit for syringe exchange programs, LD 219 could worsen public health outcomes. Comprehensive harm reduction strategies that include community clean-up efforts, safe disposal programs, and education initiatives can address concerns around issues such as syringe litter while remaining responsive to urgent public health needs. GLAD Law respectfully urges this committee not to support LD 219.

Sincerely,

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Staff Attorney

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GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders  
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