

Cynthia Cushing
Readfield
LD 1078

Testimony in Support of LD 1078

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health & Human Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to share my testimony with this Committee.

My name is Cynthia Cushing, and I am here today to express my strong support for LD 1078, a bill that will significantly improve public safety and public health in Maine.

Communities across our state are facing a growing challenge: the improper disposal of syringes in public spaces. This issue is exacerbated by our statewide housing crisis, leaving individuals with limited options for safe disposal. Simultaneously, we must ensure that participants in Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) have continued access to vital care.

This bill, LD 1078, addresses these concerns by allowing Maine CDC-certified SSPs to operate additional locations, days, and times within their certified county, based on community needs. This simple change will have profound impacts.

Improperly discarded syringes pose a risk to everyone, especially children. This bill enhances public safety by ensuring individuals have convenient access to safe disposal options through SSPs. Expanding access to sterile syringes reduces the reuse and sharing of needles, significantly decreasing the transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C, and Hepatitis B. This also prevents costly medical conditions like endocarditis and soft tissue infections. This will also provide a cost-effective solution.

Current restrictions limit SSPs to a single operating location, creating significant barriers for individuals facing transportation challenges, stigma, and geographic isolation, particularly in rural areas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Executive Orders expanded SSP mobility, demonstrating the effectiveness of increased flexibility, which led to measurable improvements in syringe disposal and access to services. We should codify this successful model into law.

Studies show a direct correlation between high rates of homelessness and limited harm reduction services, leading to increased improper syringe disposal. LD 1078 will help mitigate this issue by expanding access to SSPs during this critical time.

Delivery services, enabled by this bill, will ensure that all Mainers, including those in rural areas, have access to essential SSP services. Traveling 50-100 miles multiple times a week to access services is an unnecessary burden.

Current administrative burdens hinder SSPs' ability to reach those in need. This bill will streamline operations, allowing SSPs to respond quickly to community needs, especially during time-sensitive situations like encampment sweeps. The bill's reporting requirements will provide valuable data on the effectiveness of expanded SSP services, guiding future policy and program development.

By supporting LD 1078, we are investing in a safer, healthier, and more equitable Maine. I urge you to vote in favor of this vital legislation.

Genuinely,

Cynthia Cushing, BA, CCM