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The unified voice for Maine's community behavioral health providers

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Testimony in Support of

***An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to
Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs – LD 1078***

March 24th, 2025

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Charlotte Warren. I am a master's level social worker, an educator, and a policy consultant. I reside in Hallowell and am here to testify on behalf of my client, the Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, Maine (the Alliance). The Alliance serves as the statewide association for Maine's community-based behavioral health agencies, which deliver essential mental health and substance use services to more than 80,000 children, adults, and families each year. We advocate for the adoption of effective policies and evidence-based practices that aim to improve the quality and effectiveness of our behavioral health care system.

On behalf of the Alliance, I am here today to speak in strong support of LD 1078, "An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs." This bill would allow certified syringe service programs to operate additional locations within the same county, codifying the requirements established in Executive Orders 27 FY 19/20 and 33 FY 20/21.

While we have made substantial progress, Maine still faces significant public health challenges related to substance use. Syringe service programs (SSPs) are a critical component of a comprehensive response to the ongoing crisis. SSPs prevent the transmission of blood-borne diseases but also serve as a crucial point of connection to treatment, recovery services, and life-saving resources.

The effectiveness of SSPs is supported by decades of research. SSPs are associated with an estimated 50% reduction in HIV and HCV infections. In fact, when combined with medications for opioid use disorder, transmission of these infections is reduced by over two-thirds. Beyond disease prevention, these programs serve as a crucial pathway to treatment. Individuals who regularly use SSPs are more than five times as likely to enter treatment for substance use disorder and nearly three times as likely to report reducing or discontinuing injection compared to those who have never used an SSP.ⁱ

Studies consistently show that SSPs are cost-effective interventions. All harm reduction strategies yield significant cost savings when compared with a no-intervention approach, making them fiscally responsible public health investments. SSPs help protect communities by facilitating the safe disposal of used syringes and reducing the potential for accidental exposure to contaminated equipment.ⁱⁱ

The Governor's 2023 Opioid Response Plan highlights syringe service programs as part of a comprehensive strategy that has contributed to Maine's success in reducing overdose deaths. Expanding access to these programs is directly aligned with the state's public health objectives and builds upon the demonstrated success of existing services.ⁱⁱⁱ

In conclusion, this proposal would remove unnecessary barriers to syringe service program expansion within counties, allowing these life-saving services to reach more people in need. The Alliance strongly urges the committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1078. This legislation represents a critical step forward in our shared commitment to reducing harm from substance use disorder, preventing the spread of infectious diseases, and ultimately saving lives across our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Syringe Services Programs*. February 2024.
<https://www.cdc.gov/syringe-services-programs/php/index.html>

ⁱⁱ Ijioma, S.C., et al. *Cost-effectiveness of syringe service programs, medications for opioid use disorder, and combination programs in hepatitis C harm reduction among opioid injection drug users*. February 2021.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10391166/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. *Maine's Opioid Response 2023 – 2025 Strategic Action Plan*. 2023. https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/GOPIF_OpioidReport_2023.pdf