

March 24, 2025

Written Testimony of Katie Rutherford on behalf of Frannie Peabody Center & GLAD LAW
**In Support of LD 1078, An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access
to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs**
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 also writing on behalf of GLAD LAW, a non-profit legal rights organization that works to end discrimination based on sexual orientation, HIV status, and gender identity and expression through litigation, advocacy, and education. Together, our organizations express strong support for LD 1078 as it increases access to life-saving care through syringe service programs.

According to the National Association of County and City Health Officials, 'Meeting people where they are' builds trust, elevates voices, and addresses health disparities in high-risk communities. We experience this at Frannie Peabody Center as a community-based provider of rapid HIV and Hepatitis C testing and linkage to care at numerous sites across the state. Allowing for flexibility among providers to serve individuals at multiple sites increases access to care when people face barriers including transportation and stigma. It also enhances staff capacity when programs with limited funding can establish strategic partnerships for collocating and collaborating to offer a high level of care to people needing healthcare services.

Allowing providers of syringe service programs operate at multiple locations within a county under one license would also increase accessibility of safe disposal sites, a key provision of harm reduction. Maine is seeing a sharp increase in HIV infections among people who use drugs. LD 1078 presents a critical opportunity for law makers to implement effective and proven strategies that will prevent HIV transmission and help bring an end to the current outbreak in Bangor. We need to make sure that people have broad access to safe and effective tools to prevent infectious disease transmission.

Harm reduction programs play a critical role in public health. These services go far beyond the exchange of safe use supplies – they provide essential healthcare including wound care, overdose prevention tools, low-barrier testing and resources to support recovery.

We urge you to vote yes on LD 1078. Increasing access to syringe service programs makes our communities safer and saves lives.