

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

My name is Anna McConnell, and I am a nurse practitioner and the Executive Director of Maine Access Points, a nonprofit that provides essential harm reduction services to people who use drugs in rural Maine. I urge you to **SUPPORT** LD 1078: An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs.

Over the last 14 years I have had the opportunity to provide harm reduction services in San Francisco, CA, Portland, ME and now through a network of rural Maine towns where harm reduction care has previously been minimal or nonexistent. Through my experience, I have learned a lot about what works, what doesn't, and how to create successful outcomes for public health.

Right now, access to harm reduction services in most of Maine remains extremely limited. Nearly every week we hear from people who report using the same syringe for days or weeks on end. The Maine CDC rules that govern syringe service programming are far too restrictive to ensure that people have sterile supplies. This bill seeks to increase the geographical reach of the syringe services programs, so that we can meet people in their own towns to provide them supplies and facilitate syringe disposal. Transportation remains one of the biggest barriers for poor Mainers. This bill would allow mobile programs to fill that gap.

Expanding geographical access is a reasonable, middle-ground solution that would make an immediate impact in the number of people served by syringe service programs. This solution is more measured than a syringe buy-back program, which transforms a public health service into a transactional economy that incentivizes vulnerable people to interact with hazardous waste from strangers. Instead, we need solutions like this one, that will increase access to trained harm reduction professionals who can facilitate proper care and disposal.

Thank you to the committee and I'm happy to make myself available for the work session.

Sincerely,

Anna McConnell, MS, FNP

Executive Director

Maine Access Points