



March 27, 2025

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Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Annika Moore, and I am the Advocacy Team Leader at Preble Street. Our mission is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems. Preble Street operates 16 programs throughout Maine, and its staff works daily alongside hundreds of individuals, many of whom struggle with substance use disorder.

Preble Street supports LD 1078, An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs because it makes syringe service programs (SSPs) more accessible and helps prevent the spread of bloodborne pathogens such as HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. By offering additional locations, syringe service programs will be able to serve a greater number of participants and adapt to the needs of the communities that they operate in.

The City of Portland's syringe service program has been an impactful resource for many of the clients we serve. In addition to accessing syringe services, participants at the Portland SSP office can be connected to resources for physical health, behavioral health, and recovery. Research shows that new users of SSPs are five times more likely to enter drug treatment and about three times more likely to stop using drugs than those who don't use the programs. The Portland SSP also provides participants with Naloxone, a life-saving medication used for reversing overdoses. LD 1078 would ensure that more Mainers, especially those in rural areas, can access the critical harm reduction services that SSPs provide.

This bill also addresses improper syringe disposal. Because SSPs accept syringe returns and educate participants about safe disposal practices, increased access to their services will reduce the number of syringes improperly discarded in public spaces, protecting all community members.

LD 1078 reinstates a COVID-era rule that allowed SSPs to operate additional sites within the same county without needing to submit further applications. This approach is more consistent with best practices for harm reduction as it expands flexibility and makes SSP services easier to access.

Preble Street urges you to pass LD 1078, An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange

Programs so that Maine's syringe service programs can be more responsive to the communities they serve.

Thank you.