



April 28, 2025

Re: LD 1738, An Act to Establish the Biohazard Waste Disposal Grant Program to Support Public Health Efforts in the State.

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Brian Townsend, and I am the Executive Director of Commonspace. Commonspace offers programs for adults and families experiencing challenges related to homelessness, substance use, mental health, trauma, and legal system involvement in Greater Portland and Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties. Our programs include supportive housing, housing navigation, community recovery centers, jail reentry, emergency food and shelter programs, and harm reduction and recovery programming that includes our Syringe Service Program in Portland.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 1738, which is a bill that offers Maine's communities the opportunity to proactively address and mitigate the issue of improperly discarded syringes. Concern and anger regarding the appearance of discarded syringes is understandable and relatable, and it is not surprising that an initial response to increased syringe waste is to call for reductions in and limitations on syringe exchange. Closer examination, though, reveals that the limitation of syringe exchange works to increase public health threats such as infection and overdose, while failing to reduce the public health treat indicated by improperly disposed syringes. Biohazard Waste Disposal Programs, such as the one that LD 1738 aims to create, are endorsed by the Centers for Disease Control and by the World Health Organization as effective measures for addressing the issue of improperly disposed syringes.

Commonspace shares in the collective frustration regarding the prevalence and danger of discarded syringes, and we have taken multiple actions designed to address the issue, including providing disposal boxes to program participants, educating participants on appropriate, available disposal options, receiving and disposing of returned syringes, and supporting willing participants with engaging in efforts to clear impacted areas of improperly disposed syringes. While increased personal accountability on the part of syringe users is a fundamental piece of the solution, from a broader perspective we must recognize that the intersecting realities of unsheltered homelessness and complex substance use disorders are forces impacting our communities in macro ways, requiring macro responses such as the solution offered by LD 1738.

If a Biohazard Waste Disposal Grant Program is created, Commonspace would join multiple other organizations, entities, and communities in leveraging this resource to engage in the robust level of attention needed to address this issue. Backing up efforts to increase personal

accountability with concentrated, targeted, funded efforts to remove syringe waste from our environments is a smart and necessary measure for keeping our communities cleaner and safer while maintaining our hard-won progress with reducing the incidences of infection and overdose among our most vulnerable neighbors.

Please support LD 1738, and thank you,

Sincerely,

*Brian Townsend*

Brian Townsend, Executive Director

Commonspace