

Kelly Merrill
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April 10, 2023

Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Testimony, LD 1159 Ought to Pass

Dear Chairs Sen. Joseph Baldacci and Rep. Michele Meyer and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services;

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 1159, "An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers". My name is Kelly Merrill, and I'm an activist, journalist, and organizer who has been a harm reductionist since 2017. I live in Skowhegan.

Harm Reduction Healthcare Sites have shown themselves to be one of the greatest public health tools we have to combat the Overdose Death Crisis. We have seen drug overdoses due to illicit fentanyl kill friends and family members and devastate communities. Nearly every person I knew by name at Florence House women's shelter in 2019 are dead.

Harm Reduction Healthcare Sites are a crucial component of centralizing access to services that people need now, and will need as their drug use changes over time. Whether they need wound treatment from toxins in the drug supply or have decided that they are ripe for transition into a recovery program, people who use drugs are held in a space of compassion and non-judgement; which for someone in that vulnerable state, is imperative to them moving forward and finding the help and care they need and deserve.

You will have undoubtedly heard all of the statistics, about how no one has ever died at a harm reduction healthcare site, how hundreds of overdoses are reversed at such sites every year, and how these sites reduce cost, reduce the burden on first responders, reduce rates of HIV and Hep C, and provide transition into detox and recovery for those who want it.

This is how we respond to the Overdose Death Crisis compassionately, resolutely, and effectively. People dying of accidental drug overdose are being cut down in the prime of their lives, leaving behind partners, children and aging parents; and the pain of their loss continues to devastate families and communities with grief and shame. It doesn't need to be like this. Harm Reduction Healthcare Sites are wildly successful. I urge you to support LD 1159 and the adoption of this proven pilot program.

Sincerely,



Kelly F. Merrill