

# Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



March 27, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the health and human services committee,

My name is Jan Collins, I am assistant director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here to support LD 1159 -An Act to Establish a Pilot Project Regarding Harm Reduction Health Centers.

I am not an addict. Nonetheless, my life has been shaped by addiction especially by my father's alcoholism that sent him to prison and left my mother with four children under the age of five, no income and no home.

Since then, I have struggled to understand addiction. Like most people here I was brought up to believe addiction was a result of personal moral failing and lack of willpower. But that never made sense because I knew very good people in my community who suffered from addiction, went to church, participated in civic groups, and had children who did the same.

Attending my first lecture from a doctor who specialized in addiction chemistry was a blessing. The chemical feedback loop in the brain was mapped. It was not a moral failing, but a medical condition.

So why are one hundred thousand people a year dying from opioid addiction?

According to the Stanford/Lancet comprehensive report on the opioid crisis published in 2022, people continue to die because we as a country have done what I did as an individual, we blame the victims of the disease for having the disease. I have asthma, what if we considered asthma a moral failing? What if when I had an asthma attack and was gasping for breath, I was sent to jail. No one would be surprised if I died and some would say, I deserved it...one less person addicted to inhalers.

If trends continue as they have been, 800 people will die from overdoses in Maine and we will still not have enough treatment beds, recovery centers, recovery housing, or harm reductions centers. We will still keep separating parents from children, to send the parents to prisons and jails, and the children to foster care. We will wonder why so many children are struggling in school and why their parents aren't around.

Within a year of release from jail or prison risk of death by overdose rises 7 fold. Clearly imprisonment does not cure people of addiction.

The Stanford- Lancet report concludes that there is much more that we can and must do to end the opioid epidemic, including ending incarceration for illicit possession of opioids or drug-use equipment intended for personal use,

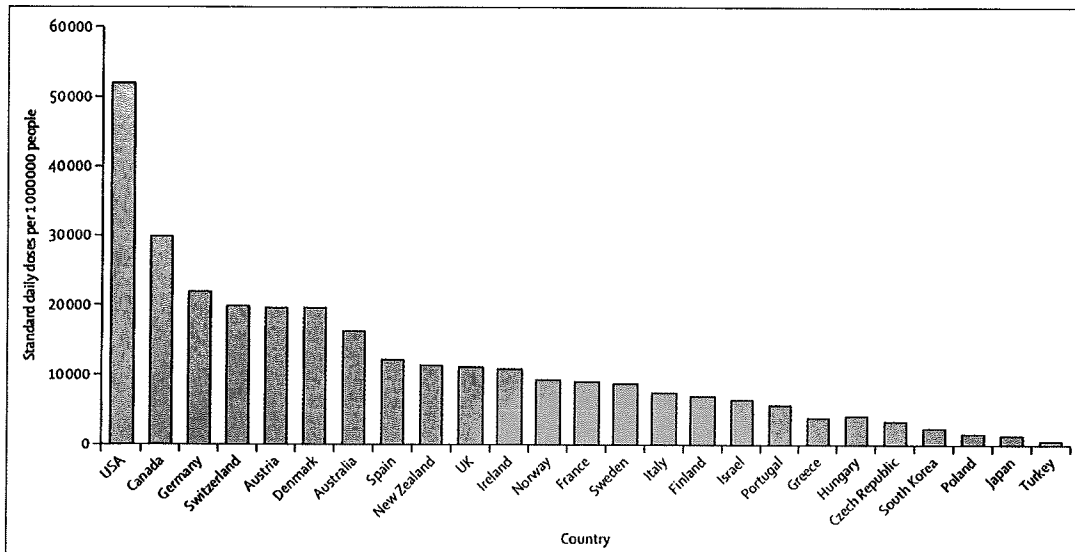
I am here to support harm reduction health centers as one step in a many pronged effort to end the epidemic. As difficult as it may be to pass this bill and others necessary to make a difference in the lives of those who suffer from or are affected by addiction, the one essential ingredient is our own minds and hearts.

If we believe in the value of a human life it will be easy to vote yes in support of this bill.

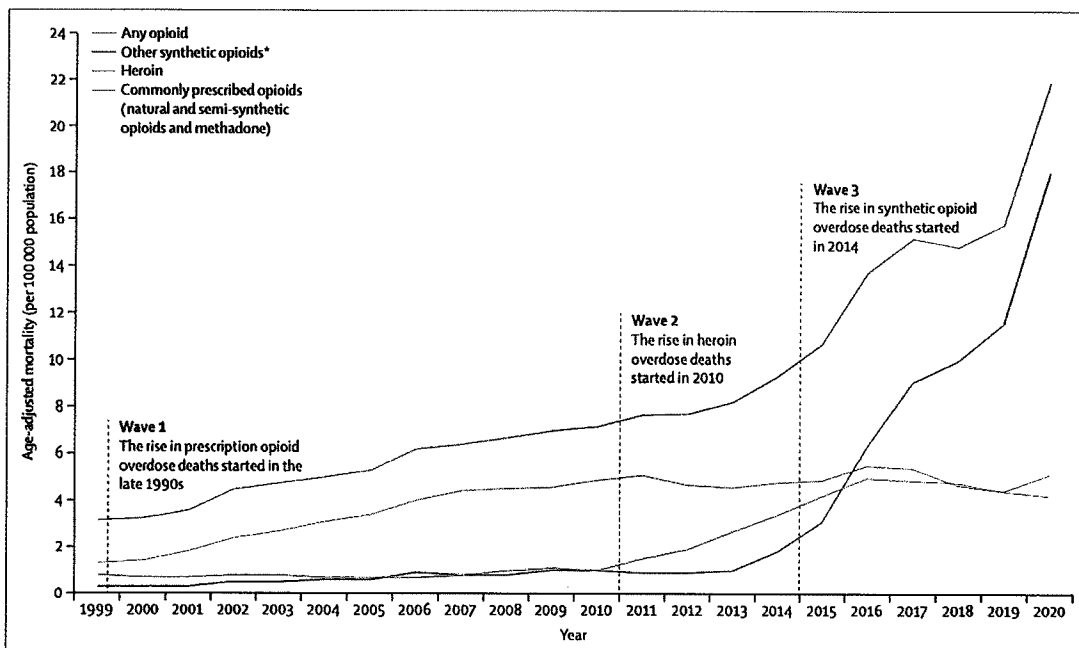
Sincerely,  
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Stanford-Lancet report calls for sweeping reforms to mitigate opioid crisis  
The opioid epidemic is projected to claim 1.22 million U.S. lives this decade without new efforts to stem the crisis, according to a report that traces the roots of the problem and offers in-depth solutions. <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2022/02/stanford-lancet-report-opioid-crisis.html>

*Past research has found that within a year of leaving prison, the risk of death rises 12-fold, Gross said. Overdose is a common cause, but heart disease and cancer are other contributors. Manz CR, Odayar VS, Schrag D. Disparities in cancer prevalence, incidence, and mortality for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated patients: A scoping review. Cancer Med. 2021 Oct;10(20):7277-7288. doi: 10.1002/cam4.4251. Epub 2021 Sep 3. PMID: 34477309; PMCID: PMC8525139.*



**Figure 1: International per-person consumption of prescription opioids (2010-12)**  
This period coincides with the peak of opioid prescribing in the USA and Canada



**Figure 2: The three waves of the epidemic of opioid overdose deaths in the USA**  
Data are from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Wide-Ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research. \* Tramadol or fentanyl prescribed or illicitly manufactured.