



## Testimony in support of LD1975 - 1/17/2024

Members of the HHS committee,

On behalf of Decriminalize Maine, a non-profit organization focused on drug policy and education based harm reduction, We applaud the work you have done in drafting LD1975 and urge you to pass it out of committee unanimously.

Shifting resources from the “War on Drugs” to a compassionate, public health approach enables more Mainers to thrive. As the data indicate, we are losing 2 of our friends, neighbors, and loved ones to fatal overdose on an average day in Maine. The current policy and availability of services are both inadequate to our current situation and often misguided in their tactics. Criminalization of people who use drugs is rarely helpful to them or our community, often leading to compounding problems, and is statistically associated with a more than twofold increase in risk of fatal overdose.

Can we solve fatal overdoses and substance use disorder crises with a different approach?

The money Maine spends in the criminal justice system is not a compassionate first approach. The stigma, oppression, and humiliation of criminalization impede the ability of Mainers to thrive. Research published by the ACLU of Maine and Maine Center for Economic Policy quantify the beneficial opportunity cost of shifting to public health solutions.

LD1975 sets the stage to substantially address issues facing Maine families and communities currently suffering from a truly traumatic quantity of death due to the overdose crisis. By decriminalizing simple possession of drugs, the harm caused by criminalization is reduced, State resources are saved, and stigma is abated.

“Criminalizing people who use drugs has significant adverse economic and social costs. These policy choices make the possibility of a healthy life less likely for people who use drugs.” (Better Path Report.)

Decriminalizing possession will result in quantifiable improvements in the life of Mainers. Raising the amounts of drug in the statute that constitute trafficking would protect many people from the threat of arrest and encourage people to check their drug supply for contamination and potency, thereby greatly reducing the risk of fatal overdose.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on this issue. This bill works to address one of the most pressing issues in our vulnerable population and deserves the full support of this committee, the legislature, and the community at large.

Please vote yes on LD1975.

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