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Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Terence Miller, and I am the Advocacy Director at Preble Street. I am here today to speak in support of LD 1975: An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs. At Preble Street, our staff, clients, and community feel the impacts of the opioid crisis each day. In the last calendar year, staff at one of Preble Street's programs responded to an overdose every ten days, reversing as many as possible and supporting individuals through the aftercare process. Other shelter providers across the state, particularly low-barrier shelter providers, feel the constant pressure caused by the lack of available resources for people experiencing substance use disorder. In Portland last year, there were 527 overdoses recorded by the Portland Police Department and 47 overdose fatalities. **People experiencing homelessness accounted for 21% of overdose fatalities.**

For many individuals experiencing homelessness, substance use disorder has played some role in their journey. Access to supportive services such as recovery community centers provide individuals with the ability to seek community among other folks who have had similar experiences. By helping to establish receiving centers in every county in Maine, this bill will help to ensure that more individuals can access these spaces. Increasing access to receiving centers will also help to expand the reach of organizations that assist with treatment and recovery by treating substance use disorder as a public health emergency instead of something to be criminalized and punished.

We see the negative impacts of such criminalization in nearly all aspects of our work. Criminalization leads to the incarceration of individuals who need medical intervention and ongoing mental and physical health support while they seek a form of treatment that works for them. By incarcerating folks instead of providing increased access to treatment for substance use disorder, we prolong the time that it takes individuals to access recovery services and increase the likelihood that they will continue to experience homelessness and poverty. The removal of penalties for small amounts of scheduled drugs prevents folks from incurring long-term penalties that can have lasting negative impacts on their lives.

The widespread and ongoing impact of substance use disorder is felt by communities across the State of Maine. LD 1975 provides an opportunity to provide viable solutions to these communities through meaningful investment and the removal of barriers. Please vote ought to pass on this critical legislation.

Thank you.