

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and the Honorable Members of the Health & Human Services committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Evan Miller, and I am a resident of Old Orchard Beach, Maine. I am a 3rd-year Doctor of Pharmacy candidate at the University of New England's College of Pharmacy. I am Chair of Operation Substance Use Disorder at UNE's Chapter of the American Pharmacist Association, and am also a registered pharmacy intern (#PI71389) practicing at a psychiatric institution in Maine. I am here to voice my strong opposition to LD219, a bill that would seek to restrict the number of syringes that CDC-certified syringe service programs can distribute and would directly cause numerous public health concerns, as well as directly harming those people that need access to these services.

I would like to tell you about what syringe service programs provide to our communities here in Maine. Syringe service programs provide more than just clean syringes and resources and education about proper disposal. They also have a direct impact on preventing the transmission of infectious diseases like HIV, hepatitis, heart and bone infections. These diseases are communicated at a higher rate when people who use injection drugs do not have access to clean injection equipment. Furthermore, these infections are costly. They often require weeks of treatment with aggressive IV antibiotics, and that is the best case scenario. When a patient doesn't have adequate access to insurance, or doesn't have access to a provider, these infections are a death sentence. Maine is currently experiencing an outbreak of HIV and Hepatitis C in Penobscot County. By decreasing the access to unused syringes, this will worsen the current outbreak of HIV and HepC in Penobscot county. Passing this legislation is the wrong action to take. This is true both now and in the future.

If the goal of this bill is to decrease the amount of improperly discarded syringes, then please consider instead voting in favor of the following bill proposed by Representative Rana of Bangor. LD 1078 would allow syringe service programs to be able to operate at more than one location within a county. This would allow for more sites for proper disposal, as well as increasing access to the more rural areas of Maine, where transportation to a physical location is more difficult.

Maine has been my home for the last 5 years. I have seen astounding progress. Between Narcan becoming over the counter, to increased access to medications for opioid use disorder, as well as programs like Windham Middle School's "Taking back Maine's Future" that teach children at a young age about the dangers of opioids. All of this work, including our syringe service programs, has lead us to seeing a decrease in overdose deaths, but the work isn't done. One death from opioids is still too much to bear. I urge everyone here, and all of our great lawmakers in our great state: Do not stop now. Don't roll back the immense progress we have made. Do not hinder further progress to come. Do not pass this legislation.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

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