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THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski
In Support of LD 1078, “*An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs*”

Before the Committee on Health and Human Services
27 March 2025

Hello Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Nicole Grohoski and I am honored to represent the 22 coastal and island communities of Senate District 7. I’m here today in strong support of LD 1078: *An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus Exchange Programs*.

I want to begin by saying how proud I am of the work the Maine Legislature—and especially this committee—has done to support treatment, recovery, harm reduction, and prevention efforts across Maine. Together, hand in hand with Mainers in recovery, the policy decisions we’ve made have had a real impact. We are now seeing a decrease in overdose deaths in our communities. That progress wouldn’t be possible without the thoughtful conversations and decisions made in this room.

LD 1078 is one more step toward expanding access to syringe service programs (SSPs) and saving lives—and I believe we must do everything we can to make these critical, life-saving services more accessible across our state. Right now, under Maine CDC’s current rules, certified SSPs are only allowed to operate at a single, designated site. This policy restricts an SSP’s ability to meet people where they are—especially in rural areas like mine.

Hancock County has **no** certified SSPs. That does not mean that Hancock County has no residents who use drugs. My constituents living in Ellsworth must travel 40 minutes to the nearest SSP in Bangor to access life-saving harm reduction programs and syringe disposal services. My constituents living in Bar Harbor must travel over two hours round trip. For residents without reliable transportation, accessing these services is not feasible. That leaves people at higher risk of contracting preventable diseases like Hepatitis C and HIV. **It also leaves people without a safe way to dispose of used syringes**, and it increases public health risks for the entire community.

We owe it to our constituents to break down these barriers. Whether it is through this bill or other solutions, we need to expand access to syringe service programs **in any way we can**. People's ability to access healthcare should not depend on their ZIP code.

LD 1078 offers a practical, effective path forward. It would allow certified SSPs to operate in multiple locations within the counties where they are already approved—making programs more responsive, more equitable, and more rooted in the needs of the communities they serve.

This approach has worked before. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Mills temporarily expanded SSP flexibility through Executive Orders, and it made a real difference for people in rural parts of the state. Rolling back those flexibilities has once again created distance between people and the care they need. This legislation is a chance to correct that. It offers a balanced approach that reduces syringe waste and expands access to harm reduction services—without compromising the integrity of these programs.

I urge the committee to support LD 1078 and to keep looking for every possible opportunity to make SSPs more available, more flexible, and more responsive to Mainers across every corner of our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.