



**Testimony in Support of LD 1078:
An Act to Support Maine's Public Health Objectives by Increasing Access to Hypodermic Apparatus
Exchange Programs**

March 24, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health & Human Services Committee,

My name is Tess Parks. I am the Policy Director of the Maine Recovery Action Project (ME-RAP), a grassroots network of Mainers working on community and public policy based solutions to substance use. I am here today testifying in **strong support of LD 1078** on behalf of our statewide team of organizers.

Maine has been facing a slew of public health crises in need of innovative solutions. As of 2022, Maine has had the highest rate of acute Hepatitis C (HCV) in the country¹. In early 2024 and spiking again in early 2025, the Maine CDC has identified an outbreak of new HIV and HCV diagnoses in Penobscot County among people who inject drugs and people who are experiencing homelessness². Furthermore, communities across Maine are facing an increase in improperly discarded syringes in public spaces. The ongoing housing crisis has only worsened this issue, leaving many without safe disposal options.

Currently, syringe service programs (SSPs) are only permitted to operate at the specific locations where they are certified. This limits their ability to reach those in need, leaving many without safe disposal options. Particularly true in rural Maine, where harm reduction services are scarce or non-existent, individuals are forced to travel long distances to access services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Executive Orders 27 FY 19/20 and 33 FY 20/21 allowed SSPs to operate with more flexibility. When SSPs had the ability to meet people where they were, more syringes were safely disposed of. However, since these EOs expired, Maine has returned to a more restrictive model for SSP service delivery.

LD 1078 seeks to reverse this trend by ensuring that SSPs have the flexibility to operate in multiple locations within their county of certification. Beyond reducing syringe litter, this bill is critical for disease prevention. Access to sterile syringes prevents the spread of HIV, HBV, and HCV, and reduces the likelihood of severe infections like endocarditis. These infections not only cause suffering for individuals but also drive up healthcare costs, placing a burden on hospitals and taxpayers.

LD 1078 is a crucial step toward preventing the spread of infectious diseases, ensuring that those who rely on SSPs can access lifesaving care, and reducing improperly discarded syringes in our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis-surveillance-2022/hepatitis-c/figure-3-2.html>

² <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/hiv-cluster.shtml>

Tess Parks
ME-RAP
tess@me-rap.org