

Testimony By Kelly Cookson, Enfield Resident in Support of LD 1738

April 28th, 2025

Good afternoon esteemed members of the committee.

My name is Kelly Cookson. Until recently, I was the director at Save a Life in Lincoln—a community center that offers recovery support and harm reduction, including a syringe service program. I am also a person who has been personally impacted by substance use.

I'm here today to speak in support of this bill to establish a statewide biohazard waste disposal grant program.

In my work, I've seen firsthand how important safe disposal of used syringes and other biohazard waste really is. It's a matter of public safety. Proper disposal protects everyone—program participants, sanitation workers, kids, and community members. Access to clean syringes to people that need them is also important for public safety as the HIV outbreak in Bangor is showing us.

Right now, many small towns and transfer stations just don't have the resources or know-how to handle this waste safely. When I first began a harm reduction program here in Maine I inquired with the local health department about disposal. I was pretty shocked when I realized there didn't seem to be a system in place for this aside from what an average citizen would be instructed to do. Most of the participants involved in our harm reduction program want to safely dispose of their syringes. The moment we got any sharps receptacles, especially portable ones, they were gone almost instantly. Generally, there were never enough to meet the need. And without the right tools and education, we see more drug litter in public places—something that's avoidable with the right systems in place.

This bill would provide the funding and structure that local programs desperately need. It would also take some of the pressure off our local dumps, which aren't designed or equipped to manage this kind of waste.

Other states have used best practices like secure sharps kiosks, regular pickup services, and community education. Such states include Colorado, Washington, New York State, Indiana and Wisconsin. Maine could do the same—and this bill is a great first step.

So I urge you to support this effort. It's a smart, compassionate, and practical way to keep our communities safer.

Thank you so much for your time.

Kelly Cookson
Registered Recovery Coach
Harm Reductionist