

February 9, 2022

Dear Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee,

My name is Hilary Eslinger and I am speaking on behalf of Maine Access Points in my role as Executive Director. It is a privilege to be speaking in favor of LD 1862.

MAP provides access to overdose education and naloxone distribution to every county in Maine, with 3, 206 participants across the state. Outside of individual participants, we serve multiple community organizations, recovery centers, local businesses and treatment providers within our role within the Maine Naloxone Distribution Initiative. We work closely with participants to debrief instances of overdose, both as the individual experiencing the overdose and as someone responding. Through our relationships we collect information from overdose reversal reports and we understand that most of the individuals who report back to MAP do not call 911 in fear of negative consequences. Nobody should have to fear their freedom because they were in the same location as someone experiencing a medical emergency. If we want people to access this critical emergency support, we must make it safe. To be clear, people do risk their freedom to make these lifesaving calls but they should not have to make that decision while in the process of saving someone's life.

While we have a lot of data that we can share at your request, I wanted to take some time to speak to the individuals who will be most impacted by LD 1862. People who use drugs and their loved ones are on the frontlines of the overdose crisis, creating networks of care and saving each other's lives. "Never use alone" is a message we share a lot within these networks, "stagger your use so there is always someone there to respond", "don't leave someone who is overdosing", "call 911". These important messages are held close by our community and with this in mind people come together to share in company, safety, and collective responsibility to each other as they use their drugs. I am not sure who we imagine to be at the scene of an overdose who does not deserve the safety of LD 1862? I picture the individual who is identified as a community caregiver and opens their home to their friends, the local naloxone distributor stopping by a house at the request of their community, the individual supporting their friend through withdrawal. While our society perpetuates the criminalization of people who use drugs, we know that the reality of personhood is much more complex.

We speak to people who respond to 30+ overdoses in a month, showing up to their community time and time again to make sure that their loved ones do not die from their drug use. I experience critical hope when I think of the deep history of people saving each other's lives day and night across Maine. There is a powerful connection within our networks because systems

forever have let us down. We share deep grief for those who have died from overdose because they were alone, not wanting to put others at risk.

Maine needs a safe supply and until we can create public policy that addresses that, we need to protect our neighbors from experiencing criminalization at the scene of an overdose. So many citizens of Maine, people we all know, save lives by being at the scene of an overdose and if they were responding to a different medical emergency, they would be deemed heroes. We are well aware that 636 individuals died of drug overdose in 2021, I cannot fathom what that number would be without the care that exists within our community.

I have immense gratitude for the hundreds of people across Maine who ensure that no one should die from their drug use. I urge you to stand in solidarity with us and vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1862.

With Respect,



Hilary Eslinger, MSW

Executive Director

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