February 8, 2022

Sen. Susan Deschambault
Rep. Charlotte Warren
Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
State House, Room 436
Augusta, ME 04333   submitted via email

Re: LD 1862, An Act To Strengthen Maine's Good Samaritan Laws Concerning Drug-related Medical Assistance

Dear Sen. Deschambault, Rep. Warren and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Rob Glover and I am an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Maine and the co-director of the Maine Chapter of the Scholars Strategy Network. I am a resident of Hampden, ME. I am in strong support of LD 1862 and I urge the committee to unanimously recommend that the measure ought to pass.

I will be joining you tomorrow morning to provide testimony in person but wanted to also share with the committee pertinent results from ongoing research I am conducting in the area of Mainers' attitudes towards drug policy. I would also note that the insights I share here reflect my personal position and are not to be interpreted as an official position of my university or the UMaine System

We are all painfully aware of the personal impacts of the overdose crisis in Maine. Everyone of us individually, and every one of our communities, has experienced the loss and grief associated with a needless death. Just a few weeks ago, I returned home from an errand to find my partner in tears, as she had just heard the devastating news that the little sister of one of our closest friends had died, prematurely and unnecessarily, due to an accidental overdose. The overdose crisis has left a gaping hole in our families and our communities.
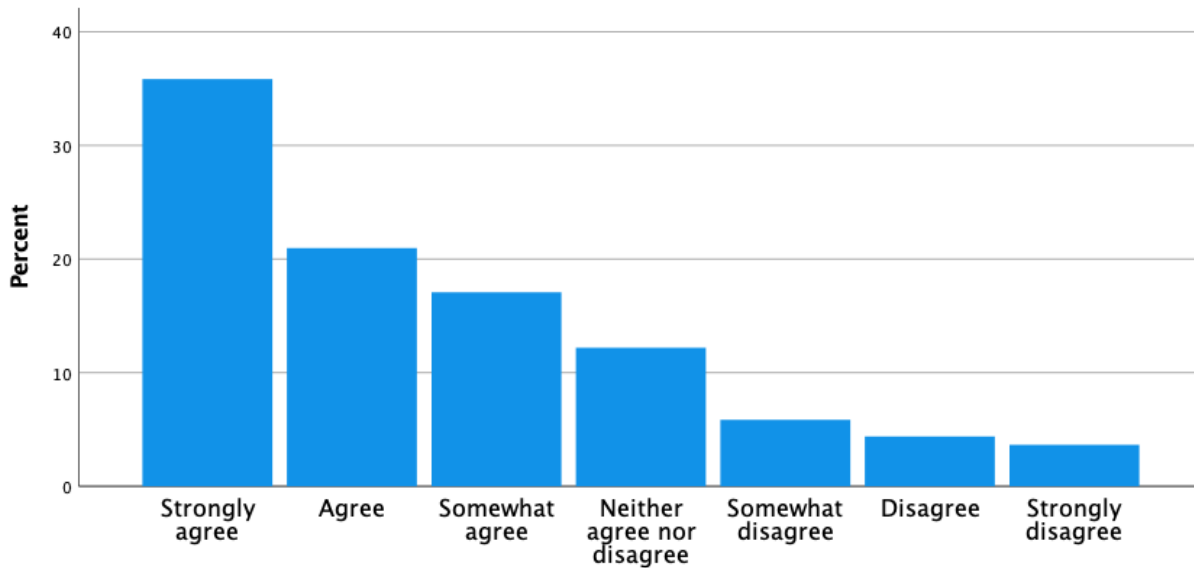
That is why I personally support LD 1862. This legislation will save lives. We simply cannot criminalize and stigmatize those in a position to prevent these needless deaths. These deaths are preventable, but it is our responsibility to provide a clear, punishment-free path to ensuring that those experiencing overdose get immediate, life-saving medical attention.

As a researcher, I have spent the last two years (with my colleague, UMaine Criminologist Karyn Sporer) examining Mainers attitudes towards drug policy reform and how those attitudes are formed. This study is the first of its kind in Maine, sweeping in scope. As part of the study, we asked a representative sample of Maine voters whether or not they supported a range of policy measures. In particular, we were interested in the extent to which they supported measures that would shift our approach to substance use away from criminal punishment. The results shocked us.

Our results below show Mainers' overwhelmingly positive reaction to shifting away from criminal enforcement in the case of low-level, non-violent offenses such as simple possession. While much

more sweeping than the more limited change proposed here, over 73% of respondents expressed some measure of agreement with a shift away from criminalization for low-level drug offenses.

POL 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following policy approach: Diverting people out of the criminal justice system for non-violent, low-level drug-related offenses to community-based programs and services (instead of jail and prosecution).

What is more, majority support for this shift from criminalization held up whether one was a Democrat (86%), Independent (70%), or Republican (62%). We did not expect such strong support among more conservative Mainers. As we've continued our analysis, what seems to matter most in shaping one's policy attitudes is exposure to the impacts of substance use disorder or the overdose crisis itself. Thus, we can say confidently that there exists strong bipartisan support for shifts away from criminalization, especially where that shift opens pathways to recovery and treatment.

The results from our research suggest that Mainers of all political stripes support a robust approach that shifts us away from criminal punishment. Though we did not ask about expansion of Good Samaritan protections specifically in our survey research, it would be reasonable to expect similar bipartisan support for a measure such as LD 1862.

This legislation is a critical part of the solution to the overdose crisis, a critical measure to stop preventable overdose in Maine. And our data suggests that it enjoys overwhelming support among Mainers. For these reasons, the Committee should unanimously vote "ought to pass" on LD 1862. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Glover
Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Maine
Co-Director, Maine Chapter of the Scholars Strategy Network