

Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
C/o Deborah Fahy
State House, Room 436
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

February 7, 2022

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

Ought To Pass

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

We represent a group of social work graduate students writing in support of LD 1862. The opioid epidemic continues to take its deadly toll on our communities and in 2022 it is anticipated that nearly 1000 people will die of an unintentional opioid overdose in the state of Maine, twice as many people as the 2020 death count. This act attempts to mitigate one of the barriers that often prevents overdose victims from accessing emergency assistance by assuring bystanders, who may also be substance users, that they will not be prosecuted for a drug related crime, like possession, at the scene of the overdose. We appreciate the role of Maine's law enforcement officers in conducting investigations into criminal activity and in making arrests to protect the common welfare, and it is not our object, nor is it the object of this bill to unnecessarily hamper the efforts of Maine's law enforcement. But, in this instance, we feel that it is vital, to protect the life of an overdose victim, that we enact this legislation so that fewer people will die simply for the fear of arrest by bystanders. This act does not grant any immunity to the perpetrators of violent crime and we are confident that Maine law enforcement will be able to find and arrest drug traffickers under other circumstances. In fact, the most recent law enforcement statistics for the state show that Maine officers are making more arrests of drug traffickers than in previous years.

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. This bill will help to protect some of Maine's most vulnerable citizens who, for whatever the reasons, are struggling sincerely with substance use, and who at risk of a premature, preventable death.

No one should die because of the fear of arrest by bystanders who could call emergency services or administer naloxone. If passed, this legislation will save lives, not just this year, but perennially.

We urge you all to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1862.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie-Lynn Kane, MSW student
Alli O'Neill, MSW student
Kessie Silas, MSW student

Andrew Bradley, MSW student