

Testimony of Maine Access Points

Neither For Nor Against LD 1315

An Act to Require Instruction in Schools on Substance Abuse Prevention

And Administration of Naloxone Hydrochloride

April 11, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and the honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Mikki Rice and I am writing on behalf of the Leadership Team at Maine Access Points (MAP) Neither For nor Against *LD 1315: An Act to Require Instruction in Schools on Substance Abuse Prevention and Administration of Naloxone Hydrochloride*.

We agree with this legislation that secondary schools in Maine should offer overdose prevention and Naloxone education, and that high schools in Maine should offer an accurate, compassionate, evidence based, and comprehensive drug education curriculum to all students.

This bill, though well intentioned, does not have any guidelines about what can and cannot be taught for “Substance Abuse and Prevention” programming, which could lead to students being given harmful and inaccurate information.

We would like to provide the following amendments that we believe would ensure the intended outcome of this bill:

1. If the legislature is going to mandate Maine high schools provide educational programming on substances, substance use, and prevention, the curriculum should be evidence based and include the following:

- Information on the ways in which drug use can be a mechanism for dealing with mental health issues (especially stress) and teach alternative coping mechanisms.
- Information about how different substances affect the brain and body (especially the adolescent brain)
- Factors that contribute to physical and mental dependence to substances
- Accurate information about the harms associated with drug use (including harms of possible Criminal Justice Involvement) and harm reduction strategies that can empower youth to make the healthiest choices available to them.
- Comprehensive information on current substances available to teens (marijuana, tobacco, vaping/e-cigarettes, caffeine, alcohol, stimulants, opiates (including fentanyl), Methamphetamine, Mushrooms, MDMA, etc...)
- Information on how to recognize problematic substance use

- Overdose Prevention (opiates and stimulants)
- Naloxone Education
- And Information on how to talk to peers, family, and friends about substance use.

2. Some of the language in the bill is stigmatizing and should be changed.

We are very grateful to Senator Pouliot and the Maine youth who created and brought forth this bill. People with lived experience (especially youth) should always be at the table helping to create positive change in our communities.

There is evidence that offering accurate, evidence based, compassionate, and comprehensive drug and overdose education can have lasting impacts of reducing drug use and decreasing morbidity¹ There is also evidence that offering a “Just say No” abstinence based curriculum shows no benefit at 5 and 10 years later and some of the abstinence based curriculum looked at actually increases the likelihood that youth will experiment with drugs.²

Even though the results for abstinence based curriculum are so abysmal, many school departments in Maine still use them. According to a BDN article from 2016, at that time 60 schools in Maine still used D.A.R.E. under its new name Keepin’ it REAL (REAL is an acronym for how to say no to drugs. R=Refuse, E=Explain, A=Avoid, L=Leave). Upon first glance the Keepin it REAL curriculum is evidence based but it only looks at students 18 months after taking the curriculum and it is meant for middle schoolers so at most it follows them until Freshman Year.³ The Keepin It REAL curriculum focuses on how to say No to drugs and doesn’t focus on what leads to problematic drug use, or systemic causes of problematic substance use.

We also advise that the language of this bill be changed to non-stigmatizing, person-first language. Using the term “Substance Abuse” perpetuates the stigma that people with SUD have control over their situation and substance use.

Many people use drugs in the U.S. and in Maine every day and don’t develop a dependence to the substances they are taking. It’s the people that have experienced trauma, diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues, social/emotional issues, etc. that end up with a dependence and we need to be giving teens accurate information so they can make informed decisions.

We recommend that the sponsor replace Substance Abuse and Prevention with Substance Use and Prevention where it appears within the bill and bill title.

¹ School-based harm reduction with adolescents: A Pilot Study
<https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-022-00502-1>

² Iotargenic effects of alcohol and drug prevention programs
<https://www.jsad.com/doi/pdf/10.15288/jsa.2002.63.581>

³ The research isn’t with D.A.R.E. - but police love it, and Maine schools still use it
<https://mainefocus.bangordailynews.com/2016/09/before-addiction-theres-a-child/?just-say-no#.ZC8J7r3MJi4>

According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, Maine is well above the average for teens who reported using substances in the last month. The national average is 8.33% whereas Maine is at 12.08% which shows the need for science based, accurate, and compassionate substance use and prevention, overdose, and Naloxone education.

This is obviously a very important issue that we should be educating youth about, but we need to make sure that we are educating them accurately and giving them tools that work.

Thank you for your time. We hope that you will take these recommendations into consideration and are available for any questions or comments you may have.

Have a wonderful day,
The Maine Access Points Leadership Team