

Testimony in Support of LD 8: An Act To Support Collection and Proper Disposal of Unwanted Drugs

March 15, 2021

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Ninette Irabaruta – Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at United Way of Greater Portland. I submit this written testimony on behalf of United Way of Greater Portland (UWGP) to lend its support to LD 8, An Act to Support Collection and Proper Disposal of Unwanted Drugs.

Thrive2027 is our community's commitment to making Cumberland County stronger for everyone who calls it home. Powered by the community and led by United Way of Greater Portland, more than 300 business, non-profit, public, and community organizations have endorsed three 10-year goals that promise measurable and meaningful change in Greater Portland. These three goals are to (1) give kids a strong start, (2) empower neighbors to thrive – not just survive, and (3) help us all live longer, better.

Thrive2027 is not a new program – it is a new way of working. At the heart of this work is reviewing disaggregated data to understand where needs and gaps exist, determining what the implications of that data are, and identifying concrete solutions that can be implemented to address them.

Based in part on a review of the disaggregated data, we identify community-approved strategies, along with metrics to measure progress, that represent the strongest collection of actions that could be undertaken, across multiple sectors, to make these three goals a reality.

One of the strategies Thrive2027 utilizes is creating policies and practices that reduce access to substances and lethal means among individuals at risk. LD 8 is aligned with Goal 3's work to reduce the impact of substance use disorder, a leading cause of death. A drug take-back stewardship program can prevent diversion of unused medication and help reduce premature deaths in our communities.

LD 8 requires drug manufacturers to operate a program, approved by the DEP, to collect, transport, and dispose of prescription and nonprescription drugs that people use in a household setting.

This type of program is necessary because when people are unsure how to dispose of their unwanted medications, they keep them in cabinets, flush them, or throw them in the trash. With proper disposal of unwanted drugs, we can save lives.

In 2019, a survey administered to Maine middle and high school students showed that in Cumberland County 5.3% of high school students reported taking a prescription drug (such as OxyContin, Adderall, or Ritalin) without a doctor's prescription at least one time during the past

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30 days, and 11.2% of them reported taking a prescription pain medication not prescribed to them during their lifetime.¹

The Maine Drug Enforcement Agency's website states that most teenagers abusing prescription drugs get them from family and friends—and the home medicine cabinet. It also states that pharmaceutical drugs can be just as dangerous as street drugs when taken without a prescription or a doctor's supervision.²

With new challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and an alarming increase in drug overdoses, we should do everything we can to prevent drug related deaths.

Passage of LD 8 will help prevent premature deaths in our communities.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

¹ Source: 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey

² [mdea home \(maine.gov\)](https://mdea.home.maine.gov)