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April 21, 2021

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

I am writing on behalf of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's largest HIV/AIDS services organization, in support of LD 994 to promote public health by eliminating criminal penalties for possession of hypodermic apparatuses.

Frannie Peabody Center works directly with over 400 individuals living with HIV/AIDS, many of whom struggle with substance misuse. Additionally, the agency performs over 750 free and confidential HIV and/or Hepatitis C tests for people at high risk for these infections annually.

In almost every case, stigma is a significant barrier to achieving or maintaining health, particularly when substance use plays a role in their life. Now, forty years into the HIV/AIDS pandemic, we have learned to fight stigma and support public health by increasing access to care and approaching it with compassion and understanding. Our policies should reflect these strategies; implemented effectively by applying science in order to see positive health outcomes more broadly across our communities.

Criminalizing the possession of sterile syringes only further stigmatizes a population that is taking active steps toward supportive systems that prevent disease transmission. Pathways that end in incarceration will not contribute to recovery or sustained health. Connecting people with proven risk-reduction strategies, however, does help individuals engage with wrap-around supports such as case management, opportunities for stable housing and employment – all long-term sustainable solutions.

I urge you to support LD 994 as it promotes increased access to critical services that help keep Maine people safe and healthy.

Respectfully,



Katie Rutherford
Executive Director
Frannie Peabody Center