Testimony In Support of LD 1686:  
An Act to Address Preventable Deaths Due to Drug Overdose  
February 5, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Tina Pettingill and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Public Health Association (MPHA). We are an organization which represents 400 public health professionals across the State committed to creating an environment which sustains and improves the health and well-being of Maine residents. Our diverse membership has a common interest in the promotion and protection of the public’s health. I am here today on behalf of our board, staff, and members to speak in support of LD 1686.

MPHA is committed to the science of public health. While a large component of this science is prevention, MPHA also recognizes the important of harm reduction and it is with this recognition that we ask you to allow health care professionals to prescribe and dispense Naloxone to people at risk of opioid-related overdose or their family, friends or others who are in a position to help. Fatal overdoses in Maine have roughly equaled the number of automobile accident fatalities in the state for the last three years. Each of these individuals who passed away was someone’s partner, child, sibling, loved one, or friend. Not only is passing LD 1686 the correct thing to do medically, it is the right thing to do morally. When provided with the opportunity to directly impact the ability of others to reverse the dangerous effects of an opioid overdose, we as public health professionals, as policy makers and as Mainers, have an obligation to seize that opportunity.

In addition to a moral obligation, the data further support the need for LD 1686. A Mainer dies approximately every other day from a drug overdose. Opiates and opioids were implicated in 7 out of every 10 overdose deaths in Maine in 2010. Maine has the highest opioid addiction treatment rate in the nation. Additionally, Maine is seeing an increase in heroin use, overdoses and deaths. While we must continue the fight to prevent drug use and abuse in the state, we cannot ignore the needs of those who are already addicted.

The need for LD 1686 is evidenced in the data which we support. But the need for LD 1686 is also evidenced is the stories of those who have lost a loved one to an opioid overdose. On behalf of the Board, staff and 400 members of the Maine Public Health Association, I urge you to consider a unanimous Ought to Pass report on LD 1686.

Feel free to contact me with any questions at mainepha@gmail.com or 730.1040. Thank you for your time.

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Executive Director