



A Better Way Foundation is a Connecticut non-profit organization that is dedicated to a sensible shift in drug policy from one of incarceration to substance abuse treatment and public health.

A Better Way Foundation's Testimony
Public Health Committee

Raised SB 245: An Act Concerning Immunity For Treatment of Drug Overdoses With Opioid Antagonist. (in favor)

HB 5037: An Act Concerning Methamphetamines (opposed)

February 28, 2008

Good morning Public Health Committee. My name is LaResse Harvey and I am the Policy Director at A Better Way Foundation. A Better Way Foundation is a statewide advocacy organization with more than 3,000 members throughout the state of Connecticut. We use research, public education, advocacy and organizing in order to create progressive drug policy and criminal justice reform in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Public Health committee and its distinguished members. I would like to address you in support of raised Senate Bill 245 and in opposition to HB 5037.

A Better Way Foundation supports raised SB 245: An Act Concerning Immunity For Treatment of Drug Overdoses With Opioid Antagonist. This bill clarifies when health care professionals are immune from civil or criminal liability for prescribing, dispensing or administering opioid antagonists for the treatment or prevention of drug overdoses.

In 2004, the Department of Public Health's report on fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses in Connecticut reported from 2000 – 2002:

- Males comprised about 84% of all unintentional opiate overdose deaths.
- About 73% of unintentional opiate overdose decedents were white and 8% were black. Almost 18% of decedents were Hispanic (of any race).
- The largest numbers of unintentional opiate overdose deaths and highest death rate occurred in the 40 to 44 year old age group.
- About 41% of unintentional opiate and related narcotics poisoning deaths took place in the decedent's home.

We strongly request passage of this bill as A Better Way Foundation has members who have lost family and friends to opiate overdose deaths. Today the Public Health Committee can take this critical step towards protecting professionals and citizens whom are on the front lines of addiction.

Also, though this not a raised Bill, A Better Way Foundation would like to briefly express our opposition to SB 5037: An Act Concerning Methamphetamines.

Connecticut has taken the lead nationally on reducing the incarceration of non-violent drug offenders. We commend the General Assembly for your efforts in being smart on crime – not tough on crime.

States like Oklahoma, Texas, Iowa, and Georgia have more significant illegal methamphetamine drug markets than Connecticut and have learned a valuable lesson. Incarcerating people for methamphetamine charges has actually increased demand and large drug cartels have added methamphetamine to their menu of drugs.

If Connecticut's recent efforts to expand addiction and mental health services have shown our residents anything, it has shown that we are a state with vision and compassion. Thus we must proceed on this issue by putting treatment and education first and enforcement and incarceration a distant second.

In every state that has passed new mandatory minimums the result has been the unintended consequence of over incarceration, increased illegal activity and minimal access to treatment, pushing substance abusers not only into the shadows of drug addiction but the open waiting arms of the illegal drug trade.

This General Assembly, advocates, and the residents of this state have worked hard to help the drug addicted, educate the general public, and generate necessary funds for expanded treatment. Any act that creates new mandatory minimums that would incarcerate people for non-violent drug offenses would severely undermine all of our efforts.

We can not allow this to happen. More public health is the answer and we can help people but, we can only accomplish this if the public sees the state's reaction to drug addiction as one that helps people out of addiction not herd them into prison.

Thank you.