

Testimony of Christopher Heneghan
Public Health Committee
07 February 2012

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, members of the committee; I'm Christopher Heneghan, Director of the Windham Harm Reduction Coalition Inc. in Willimantic, CT. We work to empower and make a difference in the lives of individuals struggling with drug addiction in Windham County by offering comprehensive harm reduction services, education, and training.

I am unable to be present before the committee this morning but am writing to lend my support for H.B. No. 5063, An Act Concerning Treatment For A Drug Overdose With An Opioid Antagonist. H.B. No. 5063 clarifies when prescribers are immune from liability if prescribing the opioid antagonist Naloxone.

In 2011 the CDC reported the number of deaths from opioid pain relievers to have reached epidemic proportions in the United States. In Connecticut drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in adults. It accounts for more fatalities than unintentional deaths due to motor vehicle accidents and firearms combined.

Naloxone is an unscheduled drug with no abuse potential and a very favorable safety profile. It is similar to an epi-pen which many people use to prevent anaphylactic shock, or a glucagon injection for diabetics experiencing severe insulin reaction. Naloxone's only use is to bring someone out of an opioid overdose. In such an emergency the efficacy of Naloxone is fundamentally time dependent. There is a brief window for this lifesaving intervention. The window often closes before EMS is able to respond. H.B. No. 5063 will provide those who are best positioned to respond rapidly to a drug overdose with the needed tool to save their own lives.

Some policy makers have expressed concern that supporting this bill might be construed as supporting drug use. Available data suggests that these concerns are not valid, nor if they were would they outweigh the potential benefits of increasing access to this emergency intervention. Naloxone induces the same unpleasant symptoms that opioid dependent individuals are trying to stave off with their opioid use. However, with Naloxone the symptoms are more intense.

Naloxone provides a 30 – 90 minute window of opportunity to call 911 and get someone to the emergency room. This action can sometimes make the difference for getting someone into treatment and getting their lives back on track.

Many of us have family members with alcohol or drug problems. I know that if there was anything I could do to help them, I'd do it. This bill is the vehicle for that to happen.

Please support HB 5063. Make Connecticut a national leader in averting drug overdose, fighting this epidemic and saving lives. Thank you.