

Testimony of Molly Kochenburger
Judiciary Committee
12 March 2014

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the committee; I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today to support HB 5487, *AN ACT PROVIDING IMMUNITY TO A PERSON WHO ADMINISTERS AN OPIOID ANTAGONIST TO ANOTHER PERSON EXPERIENCING AN OPIOID-RELATED DRUG OVERDOSE*. I am Molly Kochenburger, a volunteer with Windham Harm Reduction Coalition. We work to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, and other incurable diseases by allowing intravenous drug users access to safe and sterile supplies. Our primary goal is to keep people in the community safe and alive.

In Connecticut, between 1997 and 2007, there were 2,231 opioid-involved deaths and currently, on average, one person dies every day from a drug related overdose. Across the country, 18 to 24 year olds are more likely to die from a drug overdose than a motor vehicle accident. These statistics are outrageous. Naloxone (also known as Narcan) is a prescription medicine that can be administered intramuscularly or by nasal spray, and is an opioid antagonist. It is not addictive and cannot be abused or used to get high. If given to someone who has not taken opiates, it will have no effect on them. Its only use is to save lives by bringing someone out of an opioid overdose. Besides illegal drugs such as heroin, these opiates can include morphine and prescription pain medication such as Percocet and Vicodin.

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services has proposed changes that will allow someone to administer Naloxone to save someone from an overdose and call 911 for further help. Some have expressed concern that by supporting this bill drug use is also being supported. This is incorrect. This legislation is already on the books, we are just working to clarify some language so it is more workable. Also, it is not supporting drug use, it is supporting saving lives. The truth is that there are thousands of people who have become addicted to drugs. I cannot think of a single person who planned to become an addict. In fact, many of these opioid addictions start with legal access to medications. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, four out of five heroin users start by developing an addiction to prescription opioid painkillers. Addiction can be found in all ages, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Like any other disease, it does not discriminate and where there is addiction, there are also overdoses. Naloxone simply gives a 30-90 minute life saving window of time to call 911 and get someone to a hospital. This can make the difference between a life which may end in treatment and death.

Please support HB 5487 and support saving lives. It will give someone an opportunity to get the help, treatment, and support they need. Thank you.