

Department of Consumer Protection

Testimony of Jonathan A. Harris, Commissioner-designee

General Law Committee Public Hearing, February 17, 2015

HB 5782, "An Act Allowing Pharmacists to Dispense or administer an Opioid Antagonist to treat or prevent a Drug Overdose."

Chairmen Leone and Baram, Ranking Members Witkos and Carter, and the Honorable Members of the General Law Committee. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to submit testimony regarding House Bill 5782, "AN ACT ALLOWING PHARMACISTS TO DISPENSE OR ADMINISTER AN OPIOID ANTAGONIST TO TREAT OR PREVENT A DRUG OVERDOSE."

The issues surrounding combating substance abuse and opioid addiction have reached great public attention. The outcry by family members, public health professionals, law enforcement officials and those addicted must be addressed promptly and comprehensively by Connecticut's policy makers. To that end, I applaud the intent of this legislation and the legislative sponsors' efforts.

I would respectfully ask, however, that the General Law Committee not advance piecemeal efforts at improvement, but rather a comprehensive package. Specifically, Governor Malloy has recently announced that his legislative package will include legislation to combat substance abuse and opioid overdoses. One element of the package makes naloxone (a drug that reverses overdoses), more widely available by allowing pharmacists after being trained and certified through the Department of Consumer Protection to prescribe it to Connecticut families, first responders and the substance abuse treatment community across the state.

The language of HB 5782, while well intentioned, attempts to extend immunity to pharmacists that prescribe naloxone. However, pharmacists do not have prescriptive authority and thus would neither benefit from this legislation as drafted, nor would it address the issue of making this life saving drug more widely available.

It is for these reasons that I would respectfully ask the General Law Committee to not advance this bill, but rather to consider the comprehensive proposal that Gov. Malloy will soon be forwarding to your committee. I stand ready to work with you, and with the sponsors of this legislation as we move forward to address this critical issue of public safety and the lives of so many of our loved ones.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me, or the Department's Legislative Program Manager, Gary Berner if you have questions or comments.