

Testimony of Jonathan Craig Allen, MD
Re: H.B. No. 6856 AN ACT CONCERNING SUBSTANCE ABUSE
AND OPIOID OVERDOSE PREVENTION.

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee, good afternoon, I am Dr. J. Craig Allen, Medical Director for Rushford and a member of the state advisory board for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. I am here today because I support the governor's bill on substance abuse and opioid overdose prevention.

I could start off with the alarming statistics about the surge of opioid prescribing and wave of heroin use leading to an epidemic of overdoses and unprecedented deaths, but instead I will relate an incident that occurred a few years ago at Rushford's Meriden site. It was a stifling August afternoon. A code blue was called (someone needs urgent medical assistance), on the curb outside was a blue vw bug, in the passenger seat a 20 year old man, ashen gray and struggling to breath, the driver said they were "shooting heroin" and his friend "fell out", we called 911 and started CPR, we didn't have naloxone but this man was kept alive long enough to get to the emergency department where they did, he lived, but many do not.

According to the Connecticut Chief Medical Examiner's office there were 558 unintentional overdose deaths in 2014, the majority involving opioids which includes Oxycontin, Percocet, Vicodin, Fentanyl, Codeine and heroin. Naloxone is a non addictive, safe, FDA approved medication for opioid overdose reversal that just about anyone can easily be trained to administer. It is safer than over the counter cold preparations, safer than aspirin and safer than Tylenol.

Since that hot summer day at Rushford all of our clinicians are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of opioid overdose and trained on how to administer naloxone. Our clients receive similar education and

all are offered a prescription for naloxone. In our adolescent programs, it is mandatory that families receive this training as well.

As the posters on the walls in our facilities say “Naloxone Saves Lives”.

At Rushford we routinely check the PMP on all the patients coming into our SUD treatment programs. Through the PMP we see the clients who have opioid analgesics prescribed by multiple prescribers, we see the Benzodiazepine and sedative hypnotic combinations, and we see the potential dangers blind to physicians who are not accessing this resource.

This bill’s focus on training for medical professionals around pain management and opioid prescribing and on assurances that naloxone use and availability will be encouraged and supported is crucial. But, additional education on substance use disorders is needed for parents, teachers, and community leaders in order to help prevent substance use disorders in children and adolescence which is where they start and funding must be available for treatment when problems are identified.

I urge the legislature to pass this bill as it is an important step towards addressing the stigma and discrimination against those with substance use disorders.