

# Hunter's Ambulance Service, Inc.

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Testimony of David Lowell, Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer

Committee on Children, Thursday, March 03, 2016

## **H.B. No. 5301 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING OPIOID ANALGESIC PRESCRIPTION TO MINORS.**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children,

My name is David Lowell, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Hunter's Ambulance Service, Inc. I would like to offer testimony in support of H.B. No. 5301 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING OPIOID ANALGESIC PRESCRIPTION TO MINORS.

The views expressed in my testimony are based on my professional background as a community based healthcare administrator for over thirty years, and from the roles I have in the community an elected official in Meriden, serving as a Deputy Majority Leader, Public Safety Committee Vice Chair and Human Services Committee Member.

This bill is one important step in addressing Connecticut's responsibility in responding to a national opioid addiction epidemic.

Drug overdose is the leading cause of death in the US with a reported 47,055 lethal drug overdoses in 2014. Opioid addiction is driving this epidemic, 18,893 overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers and 10,574 overdose deaths related to heroin in 2014. <sup>1</sup>

Specifically, to the population of individuals this bill seeks to protect Adolescents (12-17 years old), the national data are staggering:

- In 2014, 467,000 adolescents were current nonmedical users of pain reliever, with 168,000 having an addiction to prescription pain relievers. <sup>2</sup>
- In 2014, an estimated 28,000 adolescents had used heroin in the past year, and an estimated 16,000 were current heroin users. Additionally, an estimated 18,000 adolescents had a heroin use disorder in 2014. <sup>2</sup>
- People often share their unused pain relievers, unaware of the dangers of nonmedical opioid use. Most adolescents who misuse prescription pain relievers are given them for free by a friend or relative. <sup>3</sup>
- The prescribing rates for prescription opioids among adolescents and young adults nearly doubled from 1994 to 2007. <sup>4</sup>

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Unfortunately, like most every state across the country, Connecticut shares significantly in these national trends.

According to a February, 2015 report in The Day Heroin deaths in Connecticut jumped 86 percent from 2012 to 2014.<sup>5</sup>

The Centers for Disease Control Reports Painkillers are prescribed at a rate of 72-82.1 per 100 persons in our state – the third highest category in the study.<sup>6</sup>

Data contained in a report published by the Office of National Drug Control Policy Programs, Connecticut ranks in the top ten states for dependence of illicit drugs among young adults age 18-25.<sup>7</sup>

Connecticut has taken some responsible steps to help combat the epidemic. The accessibility to Naloxone (Narcan) by individuals and first responders is important to save lives in the moment of an active overdose but it doesn't prevent the addiction.

The passage of HB 6856 in 2015 was an essential step -requiring prescribers to check the state's prescription drug monitoring program prior to prescribing more than a 72-hour supply of any controlled substance will undoubtedly better inform physicians and curtail over prescribing, but it is not a sole solution either.

Essential next steps have to include funding. There are successful grass root community-law enforcement based models of alternates to incarceration programs that are showing encouraging results. These programs are focused on identification and intervention and seek to target and eliminate the root causes of the addiction or opioid abuse. Please consider expanding the efforts we are taking by pursuing these initiatives.

This bill is another essential piece of legislation to raise awareness by educating and engaging the patients along with their guardians in the risks of addiction.

I fully support this bill and urge the committee's adoption.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



David D. Lowell, Executive Vice President  
Chief Operating Officer

<sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality File. (2015). Number and Age-Adjusted Rates of Drug-poisoning Deaths Involving Opioid Analgesics and Heroin: United States, 2000–2014. Atlanta, GA: Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health\\_policy/AADR\\_drug\\_poisoning\\_involving\\_OA\\_Heroin\\_US\\_2000-2014.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health_policy/AADR_drug_poisoning_involving_OA_Heroin_US_2000-2014.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2015). Behavioral health trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Available at <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FRR1-2014/NSDUH-FRR1-2014.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Institute of Drug Abuse. (2015). Drug Facts: Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medications. Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Drug Abuse. Available at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-over-counter-medications>.

<sup>4</sup> Fortuna RJ, Robbins BW, Caiola E, Joynt M, Halterman JS. Prescribing of controlled medications to adolescents and young adults in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2010;126(6):1108-1116.

<sup>5</sup> The Day (2015). Deadly Addiction: Heroin Deaths In Connecticut Up 86 Percent From 2012 To 2014, Smith, Greg.

<sup>6</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Vital Signs. (2014). Opioid Painkiller Prescribing. Atlanta, GA: Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/opioid-prescribing/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> Connecticut Drug Control Update. Available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/state\\_profile\\_-\\_connecticut.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/state_profile_-_connecticut.pdf)