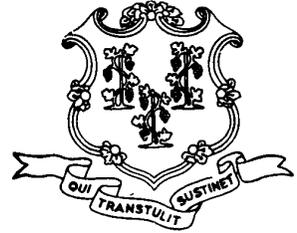


Department of Consumer Protection



Testimony of Jonathan A. Harris Commissioner of Consumer Protection

Public Health Committee
February 16, 2016

H.B. 5053 “AN ACT INCREASING ACCESS TO OVERDOSE REVERSAL DRUGS”

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and Honorable Members of the Public Health Committee, good morning, I am Jonathan Harris, the Commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on your committee’s agenda today.

The Department strongly supports Governor Malloy’s bill, **H.B. 5053, An Act Increasing Access to Overdose Reversal Drugs.**

Connecticut, like many so many other States throughout the country, is facing a health care epidemic from drug abuse, misuse and addiction. No one is immune. Whether it is a street drug such as heroin or prescription pain medications, all of us know someone - a friend, neighbor or family member - who has been directly affected by this crisis.

The bill before you today includes two provisions that help increase access to lifesaving overdose reversal drugs by enhancing the ability of emergency first responders

and citizens to acquire them. By requiring municipalities to include the equipment of naloxone in their existing emergency medical services plan and prohibiting commercial health carriers from requiring prior authorization for coverage of this drug, we are removing barriers that could keep people from this lifesaving treatment.

In addition to the provisions included in this bill, the Department of Consumer Protection has been working closely with Governor Malloy and our private and public partners to develop and implement a wide-range of strategies to combat the problem of drug misuse, abuse, and addiction. I would like to update you on some of those initiatives today as much of the important work the Department is doing in this area is a direct result of legislation that this Committee supported.

Over the past few years, the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP), which DCP administers, has seen several important enhancements that collectively strengthen the ability of health care providers to combat prescription drug abuse. One such enhancement was the creation of a detection tool within the PMP that allows doctors and pharmacists to better identify patients at risk of prescription drug misuse. The PMP has been further bolstered as an instrument for identifying and reducing prescription drug abuse by recent legislation that requires all physicians to register in the system and look their patients up in the PMP before prescribing medication. In addition, data uploads into the PMP will occur daily rather than weekly beginning this July and we have provided physicians with the ability to look up patients by utilizing delegates. As a result of these enhancements, health care providers have much greater awareness of the medications their patients are using and are better able to identify and assist patients that may be misusing their drugs or are at risk of developing an addiction.

Also, over this past year, the Department developed and implemented a training program that enables pharmacists to prescribe naloxone. Already, over 130 pharmacists have taken this training program and are now able to prescribe and dispense naloxone to anyone believing it may save a friend or family member's life. In addition, ongoing discussions and commitments from several large pharmacy chains suggest that many more pharmacists will be able to prescribe this life-saving drug over the course of the year. Importantly, the training program developed by DCP is designed so that

pharmacists, as front-line health care providers, have the information and resources they need to assist naloxone recipients in finding resources to help their loved ones combat their underlying addiction. Every person walking into a pharmacy seeking naloxone likely knows someone who is struggling with a drug abuse problem so severe that a potentially deadly overdose is possible. As a result, this is a key audience to reach and to help steer toward addiction recovery services. I am proud that DCP took this holistic approach to the problem and is now helping to make naloxone available to save lives while also taking steps to limit the instances where its use is necessary.

Finally, DCP designed and launched a program that makes drop-boxes available in municipalities throughout the State. Under DCP's program, for minimal cost, a municipality can place a drop-box in its local police station and that box is then available for anyone to safely dispose of unused prescription medication. There are over sixty such drop boxes in the State and they have resulted in over twenty-one thousand pounds of prescription medication being properly discarded and destroyed annually. As a result, every year, there are twenty-one thousands pounds of drugs that are not on the street and are not available for misuse.

Needless to say, I am proud of the work of my agency and the role the Department is playing in combating drug abuse. Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of DCP and the many other public and private organizations working every day to reduce drug overdoses, the problem continues to grow. As a result, more must be done. The bill before you today represents an important next step in the State's ongoing effort to tackle the problem of drug overdoses and I hope you will join me in supporting its passage.