



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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Public Health Committee
Public Testimony
March 7, 2016

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
SENATE BILL 353 AN ACT CONCERNING OPIOID ABUSE
&
SENATE BILL 352 AN ACT CONCERNING PRESCRIPTIONS FOR AND THE
DISPENSING OF OPIOID ANTAGONISTS

Good Afternoon Co-Chairs Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter; Vice Chairs Senator Crisco, Representative Riley; Ranking Members Senator Markley, Representative Srinivasan; and esteemed members of the Committee. My name is Melissa Ziobron and I am Representative of the 34th District which encompasses East Hampton, East Haddam and a part of Colchester. I am writing today in support of SB 353 and SB 352.

One of the most important duties elected officials have is to speak for those who are unable to speak for themselves. Heroin and opiate addiction is not new in our communities, but the overreaching and all-encompassing destruction is for many families, addicts and our residents.

Today I would like to speak on the behalf of those suffering in my district.

Every family has a story of addiction and I have mine, as well. My understanding of this pain led me to reach out to constituents in the 34th District and I have met some amazing people who are facing this horrific situation head on. Just last month I was able to hold an opiate forum and those who came spoke out about the spiraling effect heroin had on their life and the lives of their loved ones. The most inspiring was Brittany Richards, who joined her Mom, Kim Richards in sharing their personal stories. Brittany did not attend with the intention of sharing her heartbreaking story of despair, but the positive atmosphere of support and kindness that night led to Brittany stepping forward. A special thanks to Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon, East Hampton Chief Cox, Rushford Center's Dr. Allen, Regional Mental Health Board director Kristie Barber, and East Hampton Local Prevention Council member Irene Kuck for participating and sharing in this vital discussion. Just this weekend I met another family in East Haddam. Their son has been battling heroin addiction for 20 years and shared their personal struggles with a system that

failed him. Now in his 40's he has served multiple prison terms, been left with no reasonable job prospects, and two children who miss their otherwise caring father. The chemicals associated with opiate addiction changes a young person's brain development permanently. This systematic change in the way heroin preys on an addict's metabolism requires a different approach than what has been done before. Issues like longer substance abuse treatment programs stays, insurance coverage and transportation to methadone clinics are regular topics of conversations when I speak to the families of those who are on the front lines of this battle.

The bills you have before you today attempt to address some important issues in our combined fight against prescription drug abuse and heroin addiction.

SB 353

As a member of the Alcohol and Drug Policy Council, I am fully supportive of the changes that this legislation will provide. It is important that those in treatment lend their voice to building a system of support. Who better to tell us what is working and what is not? In fact, at our very first meeting a few months ago I had expressed my frustration with the original charge of the council. The second meeting was scheduled last week and due to a conflict I was unable to attend. I sincerely hope that this group will focus on treatment options and investigate opportunities to first place people in treatment, instead of incarceration. I urge you to vote this bill out of committee and hope for widespread bi-partisan support.

SB 352

My district is very lucky to have one of the best independently owned pharmacies in Connecticut and it is through my conversations with them that I have a greater understanding of this issue. Currently, Nathan Hale Pharmacy in Moodus is in the process of securing the ability to prescribe this life saving measure. However, I have learned of the potential issues with the way that this prescription may be given and if the loved one would be able to administer it in a hectic and frantic atmosphere. In addition, the cost of one form of delivery would be so high---the timed release version---that it may be cost prohibitive for insurance companies and those without insurance. The nasal spray option would provide not only a more effective process of administration, but would allow those either with or without insurance a cost effective option.

I appreciate the members of the Public Health Committee addressing these important issues. Your willingness to allow the public to share their stories of despair and hope shines a light on an important public health crisis that affects all of Connecticut. Thank you.

Respectfully



Melissa Ziobron
State Representative
34th District