

Public Health Committee
March 2nd, 2021



Testimony in Support of HB-5583

AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY INTERVENTION BY A POLICE OFFICER WHEN A PERSON SUFFERS AN OVERDOSE.

To allow a police officer to take a person into custody when the officer has reasonable cause to believe that such person is experiencing a drug overdose.

Co-Chairs Horn and Bradley; Vice Chairs Osten, Paolilo; Ranking Members Champagne and Green; and distinguished members of the Public Safety & Security Committee:

My name is Colleen Buckley, I'm part of a growing coalition of your constituents and we thank you for allowing us to submit testimony in support of HB-5583

A friend suggested I share my story with you so that you can better understand what our community is going through as you deliberate these critical proposals - so here goes:

I remember being 12 years old and sleeping over my best friend's house in July of 1986 when I was woken up by the sound of a knock at the door early in the morning. Then hearing crying. What I didn't know was that it was the police telling my friend's family that they just found their oldest daughter, Cindy and she had passed away from a heroin overdose, she was in her early 20's. She left behind two young children. One went to live with the dad and the other was taken in by the grandparents. The family was torn apart because of this and there was a lot of shame and guilt they felt. We were not allowed to even mention my friend's older sister. To this day, it still breaks my heart.

In 1993, my cousin Sarah Buckley was thriving after going through recovery, She struggled with heroin addiction from her mid-teens up until her early 20's. She was doing great and we all were so proud of her. I don't know what made her use it again on that day in 1995. All I know is that she overdosed and she died. She was 24 years old. I saw what her death did to my Aunt, she could never recover from the loss of her child. It didn't have to be this way!

I worked with a woman from 2000 until 2008. She was a mentor to me and a great example of a mother to her children, they always came first. In 2007, she found out that her 17-year-old was on heroin. They tried a few times to get him clean and finally by the end of 2008 he was in recovery. A few years later, he enjoyed what would be the first Christmas with his whole family and everyone had a great time-- it was like old times. The next day, they found him on his bed, he had passed away. I never asked my friend how he died, she was beside herself with the loss of her youngest child. Regardless of whether it was an overdose or not-- heroin use had affected the whole family and their health worrying about him.

Two weeks ago, my daughter called me sobbing and distraught-- one of her really good friends had passed away from an overdose. She was a beautiful and vibrant 26 years old. She left behind a 7-year-old son. The worst part is he is now an orphan because his dad passed away a few years ago of a heroin overdose.

These stories have become all too common and we have to do something! Please, PLEASE join me in support of Brian Cody's Law. There needs to be more help, more resources, and more after-care support for these individuals to get clean and stay clean. The saying is "It takes a village to raise a child." I take that as we all have a responsibility to help guide others (especially the young). This responsibility is all of ours to help ensure opioid-addicted individuals can have a fair opportunity to get better.

I simply ask you to strongly consider taking the following action:

- *Review and support HB-5583, as well as a package of similar proposals that our foundation refers to as Brian Cody's Law.*
- *Understand that hundreds members affiliated with Brian Cody's Law are in support of this proposal, sponsored by State Representative Carol Hall, from the fifty-ninth assembly district.*
- *Consider as well that Brian Cody's Law calls supports any proposal that provides enhanced support systems to help those struggling with opioid addiction, stricter penalties for suppliers of lethal overdoses, better oversight of tracking opioids and waste, and ending safe havens – such as 'trap houses' where numerous overdoses occur on a frequent basis.*
- *Please also consider that Brian Cody's law opposes taking addicted people into 'custody', we should not continue the 'lock our way out of this' approach - but rather our organization suggests a 72 hour hold and urges the client be placement into a clinical setting with appropriate supports in place.*
- *Read up on the factors that are driving this effort forward on our website BrianCodysLaw.org and take action with us.*

In this last decade, 500,000 Americans lost their lives to opioid use disorder. In 2020 alone, right here in your state, overdose deaths hit historic levels. Again! Thousands of citizens here in Connecticut have died since our organization's initial requests were filed. This simply cannot continue!

Do we have your support?