



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

NED LAMONT
GOVERNOR

MIRIAM DELPHIN-RITTMON, PH.D.
COMMISSIONER

Testimony by Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Commissioner
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
To the Public Safety and Security Committee

Thank you Senator Bradley, Representative Horn, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee for allowing the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to provide input on Public Safety and Security Committee bills. I am Commissioner Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, and I am offering testimony on H.B. 5583 AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY INTERVENTION BY A POLICE OFFICER WHEN A PERSON SUFFERS AN OVERDOSE.

DMHAS is a health care agency that operates and funds a wide continuum of mental health and substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery support services. We understand this bill to be specific to individuals having experienced an overdose from any drug.

DMHAS has been aggressively responding to the current opioid crisis over the past five years. Opioid overdoses have been on the rise in recent years and while language in the bill is not specific to opioids it does appear that it targets opioids. Having received multiple federal grants, DMHAS has been able to implement numerous initiatives specific to preventing and treating opioid use disorders and supporting individuals in recovery from an opioid use disorder. One of the major initiatives has been the promotion of, and training on, the use of naloxone (Narcan) for opioid overdoses. During the training, trainers stress the importance of calling 911 when dealing with someone who has overdosed, in addition to using naloxone to try to reverse the overdose. One of the concerns about this bill is that it would discourage people from calling 911 if they believe they might be taken into police custody and involuntarily transported to a hospital.

Per PA 19-191, DMHAS, in collaboration with the Department of Public Health (DPH), studied the implications of law enforcement involuntarily detaining and transporting an individual who has overdosed to the Emergency Department. This collaboration resulted in a legislative report, *A Report Concerning Involuntary Detention and Transport to Hospital Emergency Departments of Persons Who Experienced Non-Fatal Opioid Overdoses*. The report concluded that, based on data from DPH and their Office of Emergency Medical Services, under 2% of all individuals who had an Emergency Medical Service response following an overdose refused voluntary transportation for follow up medical care. This data strongly suggests that most individuals who overdose are willing to be voluntarily transported to the ED. This appears to demonstrate that only very few individuals would benefit from stricter involuntary transportation and commitment standards for this population which could infringe on individual choice. DMHAS is happy to provide the committee with the full report that was submitted to the legislature in accordance with the C.G.S. 11-4a. DMHAS is willing to continue to monitor data related to opioid overdose transport and share that information with the legislature as appropriate.

DMHAS has worked very closely with the recovery community for many years. One of the most important lessons that the agency has come to learn from the people with lived experience is that recovery must first start with choice. Forcing individuals into “custody” could be detrimental by adversely impacting those with a history of trauma.

DMHAS supports a plan that would ensure that individuals who have experienced an overdose at a minimum have voluntary access to a professional for an assessment of suicidality. DMHAS recognizes that some overdoses are actually suicide attempts, and a professional may be able to discern when the incident is truly accidental. When necessary, the law allows for utilization of the option of a “physician’s emergency certificate” for hospitalization under a 72-hour watch when it is determined the individual is a threat to self.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill. If you have any questions for DMHAS on this topic please contact the DMHAS Director of Government Affairs at mary.mason@ct.gov.