

[submitted electronically via: HouseHealthandHumanServices@rilegislature.gov]

The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services

Representative Susan R. Donovan, Chair

Representative Joshua J. Giraldo, First Vice Chair

Representative Brandon C. Potter, Second Vice Chair

State House

82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

RE: H5616 (Shanley) –RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Dear Chair Donovan and members of the Committee:

12 March 2025

Re: OPPOSITION of House Bill 5616: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

My name is Madison Hartling and I am a sixth and final year Doctor of Pharmacy student at The University of Rhode Island. I am writing today to express my opposition to House Bill 5616: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (Provides that public health advertisements be prohibited from stating that there is a safe way to take illegal drugs.)

While I commend the intent behind this bill, it evidently does more harm than good to those suffering with substance use disorder. Those who use [overdose prevention sites](#) have been found to have increased participation in addiction treatment and decreased public needle sharing as compared to those who do not. The substance use and mental health services administration (SAMHSA) support harm reduction efforts and they have been proven to prevent death, injury, disease, overdose, and substance misuse.

The idea of harm reduction is to meet people where they are at instead of shaming and forcing them into abstinence. We have tried telling people there is no safe way to use drugs in the past and it has not worked. As a child of the early 2000s, I attended D.A.R.E. presentations and camps every summer. It did not stop my friend from starting to use cocaine at age 17, my classmate developing alcohol use disorder at 19, or 10% of kids under 18 using nicotine. One 2004 study found that [D.A.R.E](#) was ineffective in decreasing alcohol, tobacco, and drug use that focused on 'just saying no'.

We know there is a safer way to use addictive substances. The existence of nicotine patches proves that there are ways to utilize harmful substances and eventually abstain from them. Nicotine has been shown to be [as addictive](#) as heroin or cocaine. Yet, we continue to turn to nicotine patches as a less harmful method for cessation. Nicotine patches, gum, and lozenges are all forms of harm reduction.

The fact of the matter is that there is a safer way to use drugs. The passing of this bill would essentially hinder all harm reduction work that is being done in the state of Rhode Island. The language of the bill is worryingly broad and could lead to the end of safe needle sharing and naloxone distribution. I commend the sponsor's efforts to aid and protect those with substance use disorder but this bill will lead to the exact opposite. I urge the committee to vote in opposition of this bill and not shut out thousands of people from finding the help that they need in the way that they need it.

Sincerely,

Madison Hartling

University of Rhode Island PharmD 2025