



Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
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March 13, 2025

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chairwoman  
House Committee on Health and Human Services  
135 State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: H 5616 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Public Health Advertising**

Dear Chairwoman Donovan:

Please accept this letter of concern regarding **2025H 5616**, legislation which would “provide that public health advertisements be prohibited from stating that there explicitly or implicitly a safe way to take illegal drugs.”

It is agreed that there is no definitively safe way to use illegal and/or illicit substances. Furthermore, the State does not implicitly or explicitly promote usage. In fact, the Governor’s Overdose Task Force has identified and adopted an evidence-based strategy to ensure that statewide public health campaigns will increase awareness, support behavior change, provide harm reduction interventions and promote life-saving medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD)s. Research shows that harm reduction campaigns help people to understand their risk of overdose, and the actions they can take to lower their risk, such as obtaining naloxone or starting medications for opioid use disorder. Furthermore, Rhode Island’s harm reduction messaging emphasizes our goal to save people’s lives with factual and clear information about their health and safety. The evidence suggests this legislation, if passed, would have the unintended consequences of restricting the public’s access to information about their risk of overdose, the risks of a changing drug supply, and information about interventions that may save their lives, or the lives of a loved one.

The Governor’s Overdose Task Force strategic plan aims are to respond to the ever-changing landscape of overdose trends and emerging issues across Rhode Island. This collective, robust, and equitable response has led to a 7.3% decrease in overdose deaths in Rhode Island in 2023, the first decrease seen in the state in four years. Rhode Island’s overdose response is built around prevention, rescue and harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. Although Rhode Island is moving in the right direction, it is important to remember that every single individual lost to overdose is a tremendous loss for families, friends, and the community at large.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Richard Charest, R.Ph., MBA  
Secretary  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

CC: Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services  
Honorable Evan P. Shanley  
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel  
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy