



RHODE ISLAND MEDICAL SOCIETY

Chairperson Susan Donovan
House Health & Human Services Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: 25HB-5616

OPPOSE (AGAINST)

March 13, 2025

Dear Chair Donovan,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Medical Society (RIMS), we write in strong opposition to H 5616, which would prohibit public health advertisements from stating that there is a safe way to take illegal drugs. While we support efforts to reduce drug use, this bill would undermine Rhode Island's evidence-based harm reduction policies and set back progress in addressing the overdose crisis.

Rhode Island has been a national leader in harm reduction, becoming the first state in the country to authorize a Harm Reduction Center (HRC) pilot program in 2021. These centers are designed to prevent overdose deaths, reduce emergency room visits, and connect individuals to treatment. They are part of the state's comprehensive strategy to reduce substance-related harms and improve public health. The American Medical Association (AMA) supports harm reduction centers, recognizing their role in saving lives and reducing healthcare costs.

Restricting harm reduction messaging contradicts the very policies Rhode Island has pioneered. Public health initiatives must be able to communicate fact-based strategies that mitigate overdose risks and prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Eliminating these messages will not stop drug use—it will prevent people from receiving life-saving information. Research has shown that limiting harm reduction efforts leads to higher overdose deaths, increased hospitalizations, and more barriers to treatment.

At a time when Rhode Island is preparing to open the nation's first state-regulated harm reduction center, we should be reinforcing public health efforts, not silencing them. H 5616 would be a step backward. We urge the committee to reject this bill and continue supporting evidence-based strategies that save lives.

Sincerely,

Kara Stavros, MD
President