



Providence

Comprehensive Treatment Center

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****Honorable Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,****
House Health & Human Services
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for ****Rhode Island House Bill #5171****, which extends the provisions of the pilot program for safe injection sites, also known as harm reduction centers. As a regional director with ****Acadia Healthcare****, one of the nation's largest providers of treatment for opioid use disorder, I recognize the urgent need for innovative solutions to address the ongoing opioid crisis that continues to devastate communities across our nation.

As you are aware, Rhode Island is one of the states most affected by the opioid epidemic, and the need for accessible, effective interventions has never been more critical. Safe injection sites have proven to be an important tool in the broader strategy to combat opioid overdoses and provide life-saving services to individuals with substance use disorders. The pilot program in Rhode Island has already demonstrated positive outcomes, and extending this program will undoubtedly continue to help reduce overdose deaths, prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and provide pathways for individuals to access further treatment.

The evidence supporting harm reduction strategies, including safe injection sites, is robust:

1. ****Reduction in Overdose Deaths****: Safe injection sites have been shown to reduce overdose deaths. A landmark study in Vancouver, Canada, where supervised consumption sites have been operational for years, found a ****35% reduction in overdose deaths**** within the area surrounding these sites. In addition, the ****Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**** acknowledges harm reduction strategies as a key tool in preventing fatal overdoses.
2. ****Increased Access to Treatment****: Data from existing harm reduction centers shows that these sites are not only safe spaces to use substances but also critical access points for individuals to seek out addiction treatment. A study from the ****European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)**** revealed that individuals who used supervised injection sites were more likely to enter formal addiction treatment programs, indicating that these centers can serve as a bridge to long-term recovery.
3. ****Reduction in the Spread of Infectious Diseases****: Safe injection sites provide sterile injection equipment, significantly reducing the transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C. According to the ****World Health Organization (WHO)****, such facilities can reduce the risk of needle-sharing and promote safer practices, ultimately curbing the spread of blood-borne diseases that disproportionately affect individuals struggling with addiction.
4. ****Cost-Effectiveness****: Evidence suggests that harm reduction programs are not only effective but cost-efficient. According to a study published in the ****Journal of Public Health Policy****, every dollar invested in supervised injection sites can save multiple dollars in healthcare costs by reducing emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and the long-term costs associated with treating infectious diseases.

As someone who works every day to ensure that individuals struggling with opioid use disorder receive the care and support they need, I can attest to the critical importance of expanding access to harm reduction services. Rhode Island's pilot program has already saved lives, and with continued support through House Bill #5171, we can ensure that this vital resource remains available for those in need.

I urge you to support the extension of this program, as it represents a compassionate, evidence-based approach to combating the opioid crisis. Safe injection sites are an essential part of the solution, and Rhode Island's leadership in this area sets an important example for the rest of the country.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to provide additional information or discuss this issue further should you need it.

Sincerely,


Jessica Fortier-Goss
Regional Director
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