



Testimony of Rob Horowitz, Prevent Opioid Abuse

In Favor of S 3022

Chair Murray and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I am Rob Horowitz, testifying on behalf of Prevent Opioid Abuse, a national organization working to educate patients and parents about the risks of opioid-based painkillers and the availability of non-opioid alternatives. Dependence. I'm submitting written testimony in favor of S3022, sponsored by Senator Bissailon.

Nearly 80,000 of our fellow Americans died of an opioid overdose in the most recently measured 12 months, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. While we have made progress here in Rhode Island, more than 250 Rhode Islanders lose their lives to an overdose each year. Given the increased risk of overdoses mainly due to the widespread distribution of often deadly fentanyl and other synthetic opioids it is more important than ever to eliminate the roadblocks to non-opioid alternatives. Research shows that people can become dependent on opioid-based pain relievers in a little as 5 days.

It is essential that patients have access to affordable, quality non-opioid pain relief treatment. S3022 accomplishes this goal by requiring health insurers to provide the same level of coverage for effective, safe, non-opioid pain treatment alternatives as they do for opioids. It is often the case as blind pain studies confirm that a combination of ibuprofen and Tylenol is all that is needed. But in cases where physical therapy or one of the non-opioid prescription pain relievers that are coming on the market, to name two examples, are called for, this legislation will ensure that they are well-covered by health insurance.

Because opioid pain relievers are now mainly generic and as a result less expensive, they are unfortunately still the path of least resistance for insurance companies focused on the next quarter's bottom line. As a result, without a state requirement, patients are often denied or provided inadequate coverage for effective non-opioid pain treatment.

As the National Opioid Commission states, "We have an enormous problem that is often not beginning on street corners; it is starting in doctor's offices and hospitals in every state in our nation." Drug overdoses are the leading cause of accidental death in the United States.

S3022 will ensure that non-opioid pain treatment is affordable, preventing people from going down the too often deadly road to dependence and addiction in the first place. I urge the Health and Human Services Committee to support it and move it one step closer to passage.