

Hello Senator Lyons and Committee,

I'm sending this email in support of H.72 with a sense of utmost urgency. I am a person in recovery from drug addiction of the most severe order.

I have been unhoused; hospitalized; incarcerated; contracted Hepatitis C; subjected to coerced treatments; and suffered through the pervasive gauntlets of stigma and the War on Drugs.

I used drugs/alcohol in a harmful manner from age 16 through age 37; with a significant portion of this period engaged in injection drug use and the many life-threatening behaviors this entails.

I am now 77 years of age and hold Undergraduate and Graduate degrees in Social Services from Fordham University in NYC. I am a past Revson Fellow at Columbia University, also in NY. I am retired from a 30+ year career in Social Work and Mental Health/Addictions counseling in Vermont.

I am the Host/Producer of the Addiction Recovery Channel on CCTV. I am the 2021 recipient of the Vermont Alliance for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery "Jack Barry Award for Excellence in Recovery Advocacy".

I come at this issue with a wealth of lived experience, over 30 years practicing as a dually licensed therapist working directly with this population, grounded in the available research, and having personally interviewed multiple internationally recognized experts in this field (Dr. Nora Volkow, NIDA; Maia Szlavitz, Author; Dan Ciccarone MD, Researcher at UCSF; John Kelly MD, Researcher, Harvard Medical School; Brandon Marshall MD, Researcher, Brown University, Rhode Island; Kailin See, Project Coordinator, OnPoint NYC; Johann Hari, Author; Ann Livingston, Co-Founder of Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users/OnSite Vancouver BC).

This past year, 2023, I spent time in the Tenderloin District, San Francisco; the Kensington West District, Philadelphia; and City Hall Park, Burlington. I visited with people who were unhoused, underfed, addicted to drugs, with mental health challenges. I was once one of them. **But I lived and achieved recovery.**

I characterize these people as "about to die" and I'm more than certain some of the people I've met with this past year are no longer living. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that for the 12-month period ending August 2023 there were 112,000 deaths in America due to accidental drug overdose.

These Centers can easily be scaled to a city of Burlington's size, and rural models exist in Canada that can be replicated here in Vermont. H.72 is our hope right now.

We saw H.728 vetoed and were set back significantly in our efforts to save the lives of fellow Vermonters at high risk of overdose death. We see significant resistance and opposition to implementing this science-based, medically necessary intervention even now, with the number of deaths in Vermont increasing steadily year-after-year with no sign of letting up.

Funds are proposed through H.72, and also potentially available through the Opioid Abatement Settlement Advisory Committee. With the science conclusive, the need immediate and pervasive, and the funding available it is clear that the decisive burden rests upon our state legislature.

I believe you will rightfully take this on, and I humbly commend you and your like-minded legislators for your courage and commitment in this struggle. There are many Vermonters today with no voice, literally, about to die. If our government will not be there for them, who will?

Respectfully submitted for your consideration,

Ed Baker ACSW, LADC (retired)
Host/Producer Addiction Recovery Channel (ARC)
2021 Jack Barry Award for Excellence in Recovery Advocacy
802 793 9252