

To Whom It May Concern:

As a person in long term recovery from opioid use and dependency, I am writing in support of Vermont house bill H.162. I fully support the use of non-prescribed buprenorphine, and know first-hand the important role it can play in the recovery process.

Although, I am now in long-term recovery, and many of the things I experienced during my use have started to feel like a distant memory, I will never forget that non-prescribed buprenorphine was really my introduction into MAT, and therefore my first step into treatment.

When I first began using non-prescribed buprenorphine, I wasn't yet ready to access treatment through traditional avenues, but knew I was ready to make a change. The vast majority of my experiences in accessing medical care for anything regarding my addiction struggles were very poor. I always left feeling hopeless, judged and less important than other people. This caused me to avoid medical treatment altogether, even when I really needed it. Like so many others, I didn't trust the system, and I wanted to explore treatment on my own, without all the barriers and the judgements of others.

Looking back, I now realize that inducting myself into MAT treatment with the use of non-prescribed buprenorphine showed me how different my life could be. I was no longer in constant fear of overdosing, and for the first time in years I was free of the torturous withdrawal symptoms that set in every few hours between uses. Slowly but surely, my body and mind began to heal. Eventually, I was ready to take the huge step to find a medical provider that would prescribe to me. Life was far from perfect, and I still had relapses and many challenging times. However, I had gained an understanding of what life on MAT could be like, and that was absolutely priceless.

Today, I have been in recovery with the help of prescribed MAT for over 12 years, and I have achieved more than I ever dreamed I could. I have graduated college, began a career that I love, and have a happy and healthy family. Making the choice to use non-prescribed buprenorphine all those years ago was an important part of my journey.

I sincerely hope that you will strongly consider supporting this bill and giving those living with opioid dependence the chance to make a much safer choice for themselves without fear of criminal penalty. With far too many lives lost to this opioid crisis, we are called upon now to think outside the box, push the envelope, challenge the status quo and to support the entire recovery process for Vermonters who are facing a battle for their lives, even if that doesn't look like we always imagined it would.

With Thanks,

Jess Kirby