

As a resident of Burlington, a college student, a person in recovery and a strong advocate for drug policy and criminal justice reform, I want to take a minute and talk to you about a bill that needs your support. H.162 bill, “An act relating to removal of buprenorphine from the misdemeanor crime of possession of a narcotic” was introduced in February of 2019 by Burlington Representative Selene Coburn. I strongly support this bill because the use of buprenorphine by anyone with an Opiate Use Disorder (OUD), is a step taken towards saving their life. Individuals using buprenorphine should not be punished for possessing a medication that is FDA approved for treating OUD. We are in the throes of an overdose crisis and in order to save lives from opiate overdoses there needs to be innovative and data driven approaches to reach everyone, yes everyone, using these substances. Overdose deaths dropped 50% in Chittenden County last year because of initiatives piloted by leaders in our community. There is no one answer to this epidemic but when best practices are identified and swiftly and effectively put into place, we are in a much more suitable position to serve those who need help.

I was fortunate enough to get sober before many of my friends lost their lives to a fentanyl related overdose. I used alcohol, opiate painkillers and other depressants while active in my addiction. I got sober young and never touched heroin or fentanyl. Others I knew, did not have as fortunate a story. Their addiction continued, we know the progression from painkillers to heroin and how heroin laced with fentanyl kills.

For those of you who do not believe in the decriminalization of buprenorphine, if nothing else, please, please read this next paragraph.

I got sober in an environment where medication for OUD was not tolerated or acknowledged. There was only one form of recovery and that was complete abstinence. During the early years of my recovery, I did not believe someone was sober if they were taking a medication such as buprenorphine. Honestly, to me that was a cop out, and you taking buprenorphine was as bad as using heroin. Clearly I would not be writing this if I still felt that way so let me tell why I advocate for buprenorphine now. When I got sober, it sucked. I did not want to be sober and was literally jealous of those taking buprenorphine because I thought they still got high. Those people taking buprenorphine were getting better just like myself though. We faced the same struggles in early sobriety, we shared the same destructive and negative thinking everyone battles with at some point and most importantly we remained in recovery. If buprenorphine is going to help someone get and stay in recovery, then there should be no fear of punishment for possessing it. All avenues of recovery need to be supported and celebrated! Everyone needs to know that recovery does not need to mean abstinence and abstinence does not need to mean recovery.

You can help build upon progress that has been made, and save lives by supporting H.162. If you think you are not in the place to do so, think about all the individuals hiding in the shame,

fear and stigma of their addiction who benefit from the decriminalization of buprenorphine but are not in a place where they can speak about their experience. I am a person in recovery today, a year from graduating college, working a couple amazing jobs, and looked upon as a leader, friend and trusted individual at the college that I attend. Absolutely none of this would be possible if I was not in recovery. I want everyone with OUD to be able to say that they are a person in recovery, and it does not matter to me in the slightest how you get there. To be in recovery you need to have a willingness to change and you need to be alive.

Liza Ryan

Contact your representatives, particularly the ones listed below, and share your support.

Governor Phil Scott

Representative William Notte

Representative Mitzi Johnson

Representative Tim Ashe