

## Memorandum

**To:** House Human Services Committee

**From:** Amy Brewer, Former VTERB Board Chair

**Re:** S. 146: Substance Misuse Prevention Act

**Date:** April 10, 2019

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As former chair of the Vermont Tobacco Evaluation & Review Board, I wanted to share my perspective regarding the proposed Substance Misuse Prevention Act, S. 146. I applaud the Legislature's attempt to decrease duplication and to recognize that the prevention of substance misuse, especially among youth and young adults, is often similar, regardless of the substance. I want to identify several elements of this bill that could be adjusted to accomplish that goal more completely, based on what we've learned from nearly 20 years of the Tobacco Control Program and my 12 years with the VT Tobacco Evaluation & Review Board.

1. No board of this scope, overseeing a complex program that crosses Agency and Department lines, should be controlled by any one Department.

Substance misuse prevention requires an "all hands on deck" approach. If you examine the statute creating the Tobacco Control Program/VTERB, you'll see it is an independent board designed to coordinate the evidence-based interventions that are embedded within the Department of Liquor Control, Agency of Education, and the VT Department of Health. This design allows for a panel of experts to objectively evaluate, make recommendations, and oversee the entire program. This new Advisory Board would exist only within the Department of Health, severely limiting coordination between VT Agencies and outside partners.

2. The Tobacco Control Program, since 2000, has been able to use an objective, outside evaluator to ensure the investment in tobacco control was achieving its desired goals. When adjustments, policies, and/or efficiencies were recommended, an independent board could fight for them.

Programs are evaluated best when an outside entity evaluates the entire scope of the program, objectively. Internal evaluations are subject to biases, political limitations, and funding challenges.

3. The make up of the Substance Misuse Board should be representative of the tasks needed to address substance misuse effectively.

The VTERB was designed with both the work and the target populations necessary, including physicians, counter-marketing specialists, low income representatives, youth/young adult representation, school, treatment, and researchers. The proposed board make-up is very heavy in the treatment representation, therefore missing the focus on prevention, which will be the true cost- and life-saving success. A new board should have the necessary representation to effectively implement a successful, evidence-based, substance misuse program.

4. Don't lose sight of the #1 cause of death and disease among Vermonters – Tobacco.

The opioid epidemic is acute and wide-impacting. Youth use of alcohol and marijuana is wide-spread with low perceived risk of harm. It is important these issues be addressed completely. However, youth use of vaping products is on the rise, adult tobacco use has remained unchanged, and so many individuals are still working on quitting. All substances will need to be addressed, not always with different initiatives, but one cannot outshine the others. By so many measures, Vermont is a healthy state. If we're intentional, evidence-based, and objective with the substance misuse program we put forward, fund and remain committed to, we can improve the health and wellbeing of so many more Vermonters. Thank you for your time. ([abrewer@nmcinc.org](mailto:abrewer@nmcinc.org), 802-524-1296, or 802-922-2587 (cell))