

March 6, 2022
Representative Anne Pugh
Chair, House Committee on Human Services

Representative Pugh,

We would like to express our support for H.395, an act relating to addressing barriers to substance use disorder treatment, or other legislation which would remove prior authorization requirements associated with medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD).

As you are aware, the overdose crisis claimed more lives in 2021 than in any year prior. This trend of increasing mortality has continued into 2022. The increased prevalence of fentanyl adulteration across illicit drug supplies necessitates re-evaluation of treatment systems, in particular policies related to treatment of OUD. Removing prior authorization requirements would afford health care providers greater flexibility in tailoring plans for individuals seeking to begin, or return to, medication-assisted treatment. While induction protocols not subject to prior authorizations requirements may have been sufficient before fentanyl use became widespread, the increasing potency of illicit opioids requires new standards of care.

Removing prior authorizations requirements related to medication-assisted treatment is the rare route towards boosting treatment enrollment and retention rates which does not entail immediate allocation of financial resources. This reform would not necessitate changes in treatment standards, but eliminate one barrier when prescribers determine their patients need a particular medication formulation or dosage. For Vermonters living with opioid use disorder, any delay in transitioning from use of increasingly dangerous illicit substances to prescribed medications may entail significant overdose risk. Further, this reform and flexibility it engenders may encourage individuals for whom previous standards of care were insufficient to return to, and remain in, treatment.

We ask that your committee consider H.395 before the forthcoming crossover deadline. This is a critical opportunity to improve care for Vermonters facing the greatest risk of overdose death.

Sincerely,

Mayor Miro Weinberger, City of Burlington, VT

Sanchit Maruti, Maureen Leahy, and Jess RoySmith for the **University of Vermont Medical Center**

Jeffrey McKee, CEO, Community Health Centers of Burlington

Mike Selick for the **National Harm Reduction Coalition**

Sarah George, Chittenden County State's Attorney

Peter Espenshade, Daniel Franklin, and Melissa Story for the **Vermont Association for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery**

Karen Paul, City Council of Burlington, VT

Andrew Seaman, Better Life Partners

Ed Baker, Host/Producer of Addiction Recovery Channel (CCTV VT)

Dana Poverman, Clinical consultant and CommStat member

Kimberly Blake, CommStat member

Tom Dalton, Executive Director, **Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform**