

State of Vermont Senate Chamber



Montpelier, Vermont

Joint Senate Resolution

By Senators Vyhovsky, Cummings, Gulick, Hardy, Harrison, Hashim, Kitchel, McCormack, Perchlik, White, and Wrenner,

J.R.S. 44. Joint resolution declaring the increasing number of drug overdose deaths in Vermont to be a public health emergency.

Whereas, the use of drugs, especially opioids, in Vermont, regardless of whether the use originated with an initial prescription, an over-the-counter purchase, or the purchase of an unregulated drug, has led to an increasingly severe opioid-use crisis that has killed far too many Vermonters, and

Whereas, the victims are not only the individuals who die but also their families and friends, creating a broader human tragedy, and

Whereas, Department of Health (the Department) data reveals the severity of drug overdose deaths in Vermont, and

Whereas, the number of Vermonters who have perished due to drug overdoses, be they designated as accidental or undetermined, continues to accelerate, rising from 42 in 2010 to 264 in 2022 and representing a 500 percent increase over this time frame, and

Whereas, of these drug overdose deaths, those that involved an opioid grew from 37 in 2010 to 239 in 2022 (excluding those deaths deemed to be by suicide), and

Whereas, the opioids causing these deaths are now more toxic than in prior years, as fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more potent than heroin, was involved in 93 percent of the 2022 opioid overdose fatalities and, according to preliminary data, in 110 of the 115 drug overdose deaths recorded for the first six months of 2023, and

Whereas, other drugs contributing to overdose deaths in 2022 included cocaine (49 percent); heroin (nine percent); gabapentin (13 percent, up from two percent in 2021); methamphetamine (eight percent); and xylazine, which the FDA has only approved for veterinary use (28 percent, up from 13 percent in 2021), and

Whereas, 87 percent of opioid-based drug overdose deaths in 2022 involved at least two substances, and 25 percent involved four or more, and

Whereas, this rise in the number of drug overdose deaths is occurring despite the existence of extensive State and federally funded treatment services, and

Whereas, these services are clearly insufficient in reaching all individuals experiencing a substance use disorder because, according to a 2020 social autopsy, the Department documented that 76 percent of the Vermonters who had died from an accidental drug overdose had no known history of accessing treatment, and

Whereas, the severe problems associated with opioid-use disorder show no signs of abating, and the implementation of more effective solutions is an urgent imperative, *now therefore be it*

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly declares the increasing number of drug overdose deaths in Vermont to be a public health emergency, *and be it further*

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to Governor Philip B. Scott and to Commissioner of Health Dr. Mark Levine.