

Dear Members of the House Human Services Committee and Committee Assistant,

I am writing in support of H.222.

Could the committee assistant please add this to the record? Thank you.

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, Vermont has experienced a surge in opioid overdose deaths — setting records in both 2020 and 2021 — and the greatest percent increase in the country.

I believe that 3 of the aims of this bill are the most important and will respond to those.

The first is “to expand the distribution and availability of opioid antagonists.”

Grace Keller, coordinator of the Howard Center’s Safe Recovery program, said that “These overdoses are happening much faster and are much more severe, much harder to reverse,” Keller said, noting that since fentanyl became ubiquitous, overdoses typically require multiple doses of Narcan to reverse.

Expanding the distribution of opioid antagonists is critical to help slow the overdose deaths.

The second aim that I think is very important is to “require Medicaid to cover medically necessary medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder when prescribed by a health care professional and offer certain medications without prior authorization.”

I am stunned that this is not already the practice. According to NIH, compared to people living in households at least five-times above the poverty line, people who lived in poverty were more likely to die from this cause. Medication-assisted treatment needs to be covered by Medicaid.

And my third point concerns removing the future repeal of the buprenorphine exemption. The Legislature set an endpoint for the law in July 2023.

“Studies have shown that people typically take nonprescribed buprenorphine to stop withdrawal symptoms, detox or self-medicate when they cannot access a prescriber. Research shows that people who do that use less heroin and fentanyl and, therefore, reduce their overdose risk. Nonprescribed buprenorphine use also is associated with higher retention in formal treatment.”

We need access to buprenorphine to continue to protect lives of Vermonters.

Thank you for your consideration in passing this important bill out of committee.

Ann Schroeder
Dummerston, Vermont
In recovery