TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

The Committee on Health and Welfare to which was referred Joint Resolution J.R.S. 44 entitled “Joint resolution declaring the increasing number of drug overdose deaths in Vermont to be a public health emergency” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends to the Senate that the joint resolution be amended by striking out all the Whereas and Resolved clauses and inserting the following:

Whereas, the continuing and expanding use of opioid-related drugs in Vermont, regardless of their source, has led to an increasingly severe 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 reveal the severity of the situation, and

Whereas, the number of Vermonters who have perished due to opioid-related drug overdoses grew from 37 in 2010 to 212 in the first 11 months of 2023 (excluding those deaths deemed to have been 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 94.8 percent of the opioid-related drug overdose deaths recorded in Vermont for the first 11 months of 2023, and
Whereas, other opioid-related drugs contributing to overdose deaths in this time period included cocaine (58.4 percent); heroin (3.7 percent); gabapentin (10.8 percent); methamphetamine (5.6 percent); and xylazine, which the FDA has only approved for veterinary use, (32.07 percent), and

Whereas, this rise in the number of opioid-related drug overdose deaths is occurring despite the existence of extensive State and federally funded treatment services; and these services are clearly insufficient for reaching all individuals experiencing a substance use disorder, and

Whereas, 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 in Vermont, which also exist nationally, show no signs of abating, and the implementation of more effective solutions is an urgent State imperative, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:
That the General Assembly declares that the increasing number of opioid-related drug overdose deaths in Vermont constitutes 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.

and after passage the title of the joint resolution should be amended to read: “Joint resolution declaring that the increasing number of opioid-related drug overdose deaths in Vermont constitutes a public health emergency.”

(Committee vote: ___________)

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Senator _________________

FOR THE COMMITTEE