

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

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

8 *Whereas*, the continuing and expanding use of opioid-related drugs in
9 Vermont, regardless of their source, has led to an increasingly severe crisis that
10 has killed far too many Vermonters, and

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

13 *Whereas*, Department of Health (the Department) data reveal the severity of
14 the situation, and

15 *Whereas*, the number of Vermonters who have perished due to opioid-
16 related drug overdoses grew from 37 in 2010 to 212 in the first 11 months of
17 2023 (excluding those deaths deemed to have been by suicide), and

18 *Whereas*, the opioids causing these deaths are now more toxic than in prior
19 years, as fentanyl (a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more potent than heroin)
20 was involved in 94.8 percent of the opioid-related drug overdose deaths
21 recorded in Vermont for the first 11 months of 2023, and

1 *Whereas*, other opioid-related drugs contributing to overdose deaths in this
2 time period included cocaine (58.4 percent); heroin (3.7 percent); gabapentin
3 (10.8 percent); methamphetamine (5.6 percent); and xylazine, which the FDA
4 has only approved for veterinary use, (32.07 percent), and

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

9 *Whereas*, according to a 2020 social autopsy, the Department documented
10 that 76 percent of the Vermonters who had died from an accidental drug
11 overdose had no known history of accessing treatment, and

12 *Whereas*, in a more recent social autopsy, based on the 2021 date, the
13 Department recorded that 41 percent of overdose victims died alone, and

14 *Whereas*, the severe problems associated with opioid-use disorder in
15 Vermont, which also exist nationally, show no signs of abating, and the
16 implementation of more effective solutions is an urgent State imperative, *now*
17 *therefore be it*

18 ***Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:***

19 That the General Assembly declares that the increasing number of opioid-
20 related drug overdose deaths in Vermont constitutes a public health
21 emergency, *and be it further*

1 *Resolved:* That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this
2 resolution to Governor Philip B. Scott, to Commissioner of Health Dr. Mark
3 Levine, to Chief Prevention Officer Monica Hutt, and to the Vermont
4 Congressional Delegation.

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

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12 (Committee vote: _____)

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Senator _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE