

Policy Brief Regarding H.859

Dear Chair Black and Members of the Vermont House Committee on Health Care,

Rep. Woodman Page brought proposed bill H.859 to my attention, and I feel compelled to offer the following policy brief. I am a Vermont resident with an extensive background in psychedelics and contemporary psychedelic research, and have previously served as a chaplain intern at the Charles George Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Asheville, NC. I have no financial conflicts of interest to disclose.

After review, there are a number of irregularities with H.859 that raise significant red flags. There is also recent history with the bill's origins—which legislative sponsors may not be aware of—that the Committee should be advised of. I urge the Committee to consider the following:

1. Failure In Kentucky — This bill replicates a controversial model rejected in Kentucky in 2023. Issues included reported concerns of potential [pay-to-play](#) conflicts of interest when large political donations from donors with ties to ibogaine-related firms coincided with the push for public funding. Commission members in Kentucky also reported being blind-sided by proposals without consensus or traditional scientific review. This was detailed in outlets such as [the Daily Beast](#), [Psychedelic Alpha](#), and Louisville's [Courier-Journal](#), among other national media outlets.

2. Anti-Competitive Mandates — The bill's requirement that the Department of Health contract specifically with a "Vermont entity" is an anti-competitive and ultimately anti-scientific measure. If the goal is to produce the highest-quality science, there should not be restrictions on bidders to our limited in-state organizations, as this drastically reduces the pool of qualified research bodies, raising further concerns that the bill may be crafted to benefit specific contractors.

3. Fiscal Impact on the Opioid Abatement Fund — This bill takes limited funds away from Vermonters in immediate need of recovery services. Like in Kentucky's bill, H.859 seeks to divert state funds from the Opioid Abatement Special Fund. A [memorandum](#) from the Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee on January 15, 2026 summarizes five principles for the use of funds, none of which includes funding new research. Further, \$300k falls well short of sufficient funding for clinical trials, leading to additional complications around completing the proposed research and requiring additional funding arrangements. This bill thus diverts money away from those in immediate need towards subsidizing pharmaceutical projects that bypass traditional oversight channels while our existing recovery infrastructure is already underfunded.

4. Inappropriate Structure of Advisory Board — The bill proposes an Advisory Board that would be structurally biased at the expense of proper public health decision-making. Section 2(b)(8) requires three individuals who have "lived experience of benefitting" from psychedelic therapy, while including zero representation of individuals who have been negatively impacted

by psychedelic therapy. Requiring an Advisory Board to have multiple advocates who have positive personal anecdotes from psychedelic therapy, particularly while making no stipulations to balance that perspective with those harmed in trials, would structurally privilege advocates' goals over scientific evaluation and the concerns of all trial participants.

5. Potential Political Exploitation of Veterans — Psychedelic veteran lobbyists like [Jon Lubecky](#) and investigative journalism in [Truthdig](#) have raised serious concerns about ethical issues in psychedelic Veteran lobbying. Many Veterans who have previously supported psychedelic research have felt exploited when their experiences and opinions do not agree with the message of lobbying groups and their affiliates.

For these reasons and more, I strongly recommend against passing H.859. I would be happy to have further conversation with members of the committee if helpful.

Respectfully,

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