

Date: April 9, 2025

To: Chair Bongartz and Senate Education Committee Members

From: Tina Zuk, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association

Re: Testimony on H.480 and language re: cardiac emergency response plans

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You are going to hear some very powerful testimony today on the need for, and effectiveness of, cardiac emergency response plans in schools and athletic events.

We're here today to ask the committee to amend H.480 to include the language we've presented to you that is modeled after H.247, a cardiac emergency response plan bill, but with some slight changes to make it stronger. I have provided hard copies of our language to the committee to consider.

This legislation is meaningful and will save lives - as you'll see with our next witness who was saved because Spaulding High School had a cardiac emergency response plan.

Many states that have passed this legislation (10 with requirements for schools, 18 with requirements for athletics) have done so because a student has died.

You have the opportunity to pass this legislation because a VT youth was saved by the very type of plan we want all schools to put in place.

### Why is it needed?

- Most people who suffer a cardiac arrest die. Vermont's cardiac arrest survival rate is among the lowest in the nation at 7.5%, due in part to our rural nature. That's a 92.5% death rate.
- This means action by lay responders is critical to assist while rescue is on route, but only about 40% of victims get the immediate help they need before emergency responders arrive.

### Why schools and athletic events?

- In the US, about 23,000 youths suffer a cardiac arrest annually and 40% are sports related whether its due to an underlying heart condition or commotio cordis which can happen as a result of a blow to the chest.
- Cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death for student athletes

- There have been 24 cardiac arrests at Vermont schools in the last ten years. These include arrests at VT footballs fields and a basketball court.
- While 211 Vermont schools have automated external defibrillators (AEDs), it's a good step in the right direction, but not enough to ensure better survival rates. You'll hear from an athletic trainer who still struggles with schools who keep AEDs locked inside, inaccessible after school hours when sports are underway. A plan would have ensured that this would not happen.

### Why are cardiac emergency response plans (CERPs) necessary?

- CERPs can increase survival rates by 50% or more by enabling a trained lay responder team to take action. They can be stand-alone guidelines or merged with a school's existing medical emergency response plans and emergency action plans. They ensure 911 is called, a trained team starts CPR and uses a publicly-available AED compared to waiting for emergency responders to arrive.
- Dominic Barcomb is proof that these plans work. He's alive today because Spaulding High School had one in place.
- Unfortunately, not all schools have these plans. We worked with Larner College of Medicine students to survey VT schools on this issue. Of the 159 schools that responded, all had AEDs, but only 55% -- 87 schools -- had cardiac plans.
- Act 29, passed in 2023, requires each supervisory union to adopt an all-hazards emergency operations plan (EOP) for each school that is at least as strong as the template maintained by the Vermont School Safety Center. We originally tried to get that template to include the elements of cardiac emergency response plans that are included in national guidelines.

However, the template focuses largely on the high priority threats of storm, fire and active shooter and suggests in a sample annex that schools could include a medical emergency as part of their EOP. While the template references some elements we'd like included, having a CERPS is not required, and there are elements that are missing which are shown in red below.

### What is included in a CERPs?

- The language we are asking you to include in the Misc. Ed bill would ensure the following is included in school and sports' cardiac emergency response plans:
  - establishment of a cardiac emergency response team;
  - guidelines for when a team is activated;
  - implementation of AED placement and routine maintenance;
  - dissemination of the plan throughout the school campus;
  - maintaining ongoing staff training in CPR and AED use;
  - practice drills; integrating local EMS with the plan;
  - ongoing and annual review and evaluation of the plan;
  - AED placement (in accordance with AHA guidelines).

**This would not be difficult or costly for VT schools:**

- More than 211 VT schools already have AEDs.
- The Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust (VSBIT) has school safety grants available. They cover 51 SU/SD's in their program and the safety grants may be awarded up to \$10,000 per SU/SD per fiscal year. AEDs, which average around \$1500, are an allowable use of the grants. No school has been denied.
- School nurses would largely take on the role of implementing these plans at their schools. The Vermont State School Nurses has endorsed this legislation.
- Westminster Center School Nurse Kathleen Goodell told House Education Committee members "anyone who pushes back on the issue simply doesn't know how easy it is." She cited resources and templates available by both Project Adam and the American Heart Association.
- The barriers cited in the Larner College of Medicine student survey were largely time constraints, insufficient support and lack of guidance. With the resources noted above, this would not be a hard lift for schools.
- In fact, Mount Abraham High School's athletic director and athletic trainer actually created an app for their schools at no cost to provide coaches and others instant access to plans on their phones should a cardiac or other health emergency happen. It contains field locations, coaches' phone numbers, emergency protocols and AED locations.

**There is broad support for this legislation. It is supported by:**

- American Heart Association
- Vermont State School Nurses Association
- American College of Cardiology – Norther New England Chapter
- Vermont Association of Athletic Trainers
- Vermont Association of Family Physicians
- Vermont Medical Society
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Vermont Chapter
- University of Vermont Children's Hospital
- University of Vermont Health Network
- Cardiac Kids of Vermont
- Vermont Public Health Association
- Miss Vermont Scholarship Organization

**Please act now so no more lives are lost:**

You never know when a cardiac emergency will occur. I'd like to leave you with a statement by Alburg mom Kristy Bohannon who couldn't be here to testify.

*Imagine getting a call from your child's school that your child is unresponsive. As a parent, phone calls from school usually mean that your kids are getting into*

*trouble or they're in the nurse's office with a minor scrape or headache. But, on April 14, 2022, just after lunch, I answered a life-changing phone call from my daughter's elementary school. "Adrianna was just jogging laps and collapsed, had a seizure and she's unresponsive," they said.*

*The time between hanging up the phone to Adrianna arriving at the hospital where I was employed was the longest of my life. The hardest medical consent I will ever have to give was to stop CPR and let my daughter go.*

*Ultimately, my beautiful daughter, Adrianna Lee Bohannon, lost her life tragically to cardiac arrest on April 14th, 2022.*

*I strongly believe this outcome could have been different if Adrianna's school had a cardiac emergency response plan. CPR, if performed immediately, can double or triple a person's chance of survival. I am not sure if CPR was immediate or when the AED was used, and only the school nurse and a custodian knew how to use an AED. My daughter was one of the 23,000 children who experience cardiac arrest outside of a hospital each year, and she was one of the 90% who did not survive.*

Please include our proposed cardiac emergency response plan language in the Miscellaneous Education bill so this requirement can be enacted this year.

This will ensure these plans are in place in Vermont schools in the fall and that any cardiac arrest victim at VT schools and sports – whether it be a student, coach, official or visitor – has the best possible chance of survival.

7.5% isn't a passing grade anywhere.