



Date: May 7, 2025

To: Chair Bongartz and Senate Education Committee Members

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

Re: Testimony on H.480 – importance of requiring cardiac emergency response plans

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify again on this important issue. We urge you to keep the cardiac emergency response plan (CERPs) language in the Miscellaneous Education bill.

We know of the concerns of the Agency of Education, because we have talked at length with the Agency.

Let me take a few minutes to discuss the work we did with the AOE and others and how we ended up asking for this legislation.

- We reached out to Rob Evans with the Vermont School Safety Center in November 2023 to request that our CERP requirements be included in the all-hazards emergency operations plan template that schools would be required to follow.
- We followed up again in January 2024 as Rob was hoping to have the template by the end of the month and it was under review by AOE. We continued outreach to various AOE contacts including Ted Fisher, Ian Burfoot-Rochford, Courtney O'Brien, and Taylor Goodwin in March, June, and July including sending our CERPs guidelines and resources.
- We met with the Vermont Department of Health on multiple occasions to determine both the number of cardiac arrests at Vermont schools and the number of schools with AEDs. We met with Commissioner Levine who called this effort "low hanging fruit."
- We discovered schools and other entities were required to register their AEDs with VDH. As only 40 schools had registered, we reached out to AOE to inform them of this law and provide language they could share with schools. To date, 211 school entities have now registered that they have AEDs and we suspect that number is likely higher.
- We also did our own survey of schools with the students from Larner College of Medicine Public Health class. We found few schools had plans.

We have done our due diligence, met with organizations and schools across the state and have not found one single organization that opposes this legislation.

- We met with school nurses at the Vermont State School Nurses Association Conference in August. They want this and have signed on in support. Nurses called this legislation a “must have,” noted they have schools where AEDs are locked up after hours, and said CERPs should be implemented at all schools. VSSNA President Kelly McGovern submitted testimony stating how critical this requirement is for schools that might not have a school nurse, “Not having a school nurse as a first responder and someone to coordinate a response to cardiac emergencies makes having a thorough plan that much more important.”
- We met with the Vermont Association of Athletic Trainers who strongly support this as a requirement and have testified in favor of this legislation.

As stated in testimony by athletic trainer and the Vice Chair of the Vermont Principals Association’s Sports Medicine Advisory Committee Kyle Peckham, “These plans should not be optional, suggested, or recommended—they must be mandated by law.

...policy doesn’t carry the same weight as law. Policies can change. Policies can be ignored. Laws can’t.”

Kyle also stated that the Vermont legislature passed legislation requiring concussion management plans for school sports and the result is there is no debate that these will be done. Schools know they must.

- The Society of Health and Physical Educators, American College of Cardiology, American Academy of Pediatrics, Vermont Medical Society Vermont Public Health Association, VT Association of Family Practitioners, University of Vermont Health Network, Vermont Children’s Hospital, Cardiac Kids and Miss VT Organization all support this as a requirement.

We understand the Agency of Education’s position, know there is a lot currently going on with education, and appreciate they believe a recommendation might be easier to implement -- but we disagree.

We’ve heard testimony on the record from others that if we don’t require a plan, it doesn’t get done. There is a disconnect between what we’re hearing from AOE and what we’re hearing from schools and Vermont organizations.

Numerous other states have figured out how to do this. To date, 15 states have required CERPs for schools and 22 states require CERPs for athletics.

A cost benefit analysis also weighs in our favor. There is little cost to schools to implement and the benefit of a life-saved is great.

We'd like to stress the ease at which schools can implement these plans, the resources available and the very minimal costs of doing so.

### COST

The estimated cost of an automated external defibrillator (AED) is between \$500 and \$1800.

- Kyle Peckham noted in his testimony, that's comparable to the cost of one bus trip from Chittenden County to Bennington or Rutland counties.
- Mt Abe got their AEDs for \$500.
- Brattleboro has 13 AEDs and many schools have multiple AEDs

### AVAILABLE FUNDING

This is not an unfunded mandate as there are many resources available to schools to purchase AEDS and create plans.

- [Vermont School Boards insurance Trust \(VSBIT\)](#) – Has easily available safety grants ranging from \$7500-\$10k that can be used for the purchase of AEDs.

VSBIT covers 90% of Vermont schools and has 51 SU/SD's in its program.

The safety grants may be awarded up to \$10k for *each* SU/SD each year.

No school has ever been turned down for a request for AED funding according to David Pickel, Director of VSBIT Multi-Line Program.

- There are also other grants available, too, such as the AEDs for Youth Program through the NFL and Smart Heart Coalition.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Templates for cardiac emergency response plans for both schools and athletic events are available from the [American Heart Association](#) and [Project Adam](#). Resources include:

- A [protocol](#) which includes details on the plan components
- [Templates](#) (Project Adam actually has 4 different versions) (Kyle Peckham testified that he created their plan in an hour.)
- [Poster](#) (Brattleboro High School has a similar poster in all rooms)

But let me return to why this is important and why now:

### WHY CARDIAC EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS?

While at least 211 Vermont schools have purchased AEDs, if there is not a plan to ensure that the AED is properly placed, publicly available, and maintained, then the likelihood of saving lives drops dramatically. Today only 87 VT schools have plans.

- 1) Even though the majority of Vermont schools have AEDs, they don't have cardiac emergency response plans that will ensure:
  - a team is trained and always available and aren't fearful to act,
  - AEDs are properly placed, maintained regularly and aren't locked and unavailable (as noted by athletic trainer Matt Howland's testimony, it took them 15 minutes to get the AED from a locked school),
  - drills occur annually and the plan is evaluated to ensure the best chance of survival in an emergency, and
  - the plan is integrated with EMS.
- 2) These plans increase survival rates.
  - In schools with cardiac emergency response plans, survival rates have increased by 50% or more.
  - Milton High School student Dominic Barcomb was saved in January because Spaulding High School has a cardiac emergency response plan. Dominic has already returned to playing sports.  
[Milton student makes return to high school sports months after suffering cardiac arrest](#)
  - This compares to Alburgh youth Adrianna Bohannon who did not survive following a cardiac arrest in gym class.

Though the agency's testimony states that most of the CERPS requirements are in place as part of the all-hazard emergency response plan template, the template only suggests in a sample annex that schools could include a cardiac element as part of a medical emergency plan in their EOP.

While the template references some elements we'd like included, having a CERPS is not required, but rather recommended and there are elements that are missing which are noted below.

- establishment of a cardiac emergency response team;

- implementation of AED placement and routine maintenance;
- maintaining ongoing staff training in CPR and AED use;
- practice drills;
- AED placement (in accordance with AHA guidelines).

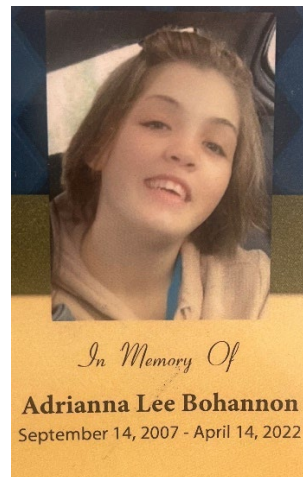
Another critical element that is missing is any requirement for athletic events to have a CERP or an Athletic Emergency Action Plan that contains CERP requirements.

When something as important as a potential life saved is what hangs in the balance, we stress to the committee that the current recommendation that schools consider cardiac plans in potential medical emergency plans is not enough.

Vermont already lost one student to a cardiac arrest at school without this requirement. We can't leave this to chance.

Alburgh youth Adrianna Bohannon died at the age of 14 following a cardiac arrest at gym class.

Her mother Kristy got a call on April 14, 2022 that her daughter was jogging laps, collapsed and was unresponsive. Kristy was told that only the school nurse and custodian were trained in how to use an AED.



This is why cardiac emergency response plans need to be required.

As Kristy said in her email to the committee last night, "Recommending, leaves too much space for tragedies to occur."