

February 17, 2021

The Honorable Charniele L. Herring
Virginia House of Delegates
Pocahontas Building, Room E606
900 East Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: American Medical Association support for House Bill 2322

Dear Delegate Herring:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing in strong support of Virginia House Bill (H.B.) 2322, as amended. The AMA commends your leadership as the Chief Patron for this bill. This bill provides comprehensive, public health focused policy and procedures to help ensure that any funds received from opioid-related litigation are used by the Commonwealth of Virginia, “for efforts to treat, prevent, and reduce opioid use disorder and the misuse of opioids in the Commonwealth.”

The Commonwealth already has demonstrated leadership in multiple areas to help save lives from overdose and improve care for those with an opioid use disorder. Virginia’s Addiction and Recovery Treatment Services (ARTS) in Medicaid has been highlighted by the AMA for several years as an exemplary effort to help increase access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders. The AMA holds this up as a national example because it demonstrates that when public officials, public health leaders and the medical and health care community work together to remove barriers to care, patients benefit, and lives are saved.

Similar to the ARTS program, the AMA sees H.B. 2322 as the type of comprehensive policy that will benefit patients. Specifically, the AMA supports multiple areas in the proposed legislation:

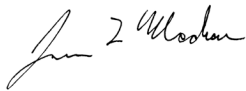
- Creation of a Board of Directors that is comprised of a broad range of key stakeholders, including medical professionals, community leaders, and public officials.
- The broad range of efforts to condition funds to focus on support for evidence-based treatment of opioid use disorder and any co-occurring substance use disorder or mental health conditions; support for evidence-based efforts for justice-involved individuals, pregnant or parenting women; and broad efforts to focus on preventing overdose and death.
- Creation of a dedicated fund to carry out the purposes of H.B. 2322, and to include all “settlements, judgments, verdicts, and other court orders relating to claims regarding the manufacturing, marketing, distribution, or sale of opioids.”
- Provisions that address the need to support existing programs with proven success, new programs to address health inequities, and transparency provisions to ensure that there is appropriate monitoring and oversight of funds disbursed.

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As you know, Virginia is not alone in seeing the nation's overdose epidemic change into a multi-faceted one now dominated by overdose and death due to illicitly manufactured fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, methamphetamine, and cocaine. Death due to causes related to prescription opioids and heroin also remain unacceptably high. H.B. 2322 will provide Virginia with the flexibility and direction to address this more complicated and deadly epidemic.

For these reasons, the AMA strongly supports H.B. 2322 and encourages the Senate to vote in support. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Blaney-Koen, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at daniel.blaney-koen@ama-assn.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Medical Society of Virginia