

April 8, 2021

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chair
House Committee on Health and Human Services
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: American Medical Association support for House Bill 5245, An Act “Relating to Health and Safety—Harm Reduction Center Advisory Committee and Pilot Program”

Dear Chair Casey:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, the AMA is writing in support of Rhode Island House Bill (H.B.) 5245, an Act “Relating to Health and Safety—Harm Reduction Center Advisory Committee and Pilot Program.” The AMA supports this bill because it would establish an overdose prevention site (OPS) pilot program that would be designed, monitored, and evaluated to generate data to inform policymakers on the feasibility, effectiveness, and legal aspects of an OPS in reducing harms and health care costs related to, among other things, injection drug use.

We also support H.B. 5245 because it would establish a multidisciplinary advisory board. This advisory board wisely includes members from the law enforcement community, physicians, patients, and family members affected by Rhode Island’s drug overdose epidemic, and other representatives from Rhode Island communities. This combination of medical, legal, and lived experience will provide the state with essential information to help ensure the OPS meets the state’s goals to reduce overdose and save lives.

In context, the AMA has supported a similar effort in Pennsylvania.¹ We were supportive of the Pennsylvania effort due to the need, in that state, for prioritizing individual and community health and well-being through evidence-based solutions to address the harms of drug-related overdose, including the implementation of pilot supervised consumption sites.

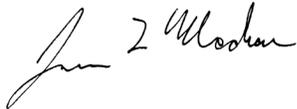
¹ See, Amended Brief of Amici Curiae AIDS United, et al., *United States of American v. Safehouse*. July 3, 2020. Available at <https://www.safehousephilly.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2020-07/amicus%20in%20support%20amended%20brief%20of%20AIDS%20United%20et%20al.%207.3.20.pdf>

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Finally, we believe that the implementation of one or more OPS in Rhode Island, pursuant to the structure of H.B. 5245, is particularly timely and essential due to the fact that drug overdose rates in Rhode Island—as in nearly every other state in the nation—increased in 2020.² The AMA is deeply concerned by increasing death involving illicit fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine. We further acknowledge that while overdose involving prescription opioids and heroin may have “stabilized,” it remains far too high.

For these reasons, the AMA urges a yes vote on H.B. 5245. 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 the first name "James" being the most prominent.

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Rhode Island Medical Society

² Data from the Rhode Island Department of Health (DOH) indicates a 26 percent increase in drug overdose deaths in the six-month period from January 1, 2020 – July 31, 2020 compared to January 1, 2019 – July 31, 2019. Preliminary data from the RI DOH also indicates drug-related deaths are at an all-time high. See <https://health.ri.gov/data/drugoverdoses/>