



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 24, 2021**

HB 5597, An Act Concerning Opioids

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 5597, An Act Concerning Opioids**. CHA supports the bill.

Before commenting on this bill, it is important to acknowledge that, since early 2020, Connecticut's hospitals and health systems have been at the center of the global public health emergency, acting as the critical partner in the state's response to COVID-19. Hospitals expanded critical care capacity, stood up countless community COVID-19 testing locations, and are a critical component of the vaccine distribution plan. Through it all, hospitals and health systems have continued to provide high-quality care for everyone, regardless of ability to pay. This tireless commitment to the COVID-19 response confirms the value of strong hospitals in Connecticut's public health infrastructure and economy and reinforces the need for a strong partnership between the state and hospitals.

HB 5597 would establish a task force to study protocols used by first responders, emergency medical services personnel, police officers, hospital personnel, and medical examiners following an opioid-overdose death.

Connecticut hospitals and health systems have been engaged for years in efforts to reduce inappropriate opioid use while ensuring patients have appropriate pain medication. They were among the first in the nation to adopt voluntary opioid prescribing guidelines to help emergency department (ED) staff treat patients with chronic pain conditions.

CHA and Connecticut hospitals remain committed to collaborating with the state to combat the opioid epidemic. As an example, CHA is presently supporting the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) by providing educational services to providers, other clinical staff, and patients related to the causes of opioid use disorder and associated therapeutics. This work is being done pursuant to the Parents Recovering from Opioid Use Disorder (PROUD) grant.

Other measures taken by hospitals and health systems include:

- Serving on a variety of task forces and working groups in furtherance of the state's efforts to reduce the potential for people to become addicted to opioid medication
- Sponsoring continuing education programs for prescribers on the topic of controlled substances
- Deploying recovery coaches in EDs
- Hosting evening intensive-outpatient programs for patients recovering from substance use disorder
- Supplying naloxone kits to first responders, as well as to patients and their loved ones
- Incorporating opioid awareness into clinical integrated-care programs
- Sponsoring community awareness and education programs
- Screening and enrolling patients in buprenorphine/naloxone treatment programs for opioid dependence
- Establishing a statewide collaborative to assess and treat babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)
- Initiating the NAS Comprehensive Education and Needs Training (NASCENT) project, which educates providers on best practices for opioid prescribing and NAS treatment, as well as identifying substance-use disorders in women of childbearing age
- Partnering with the CHA Connecticut Perinatal Quality Collaborative to improve the health, equity and quality of care for mothers and infants, including those affected by opioid-use disorder

Overdose deaths from opioids have risen in Connecticut as the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded social stressors and increased isolation. According to the Department of Public Health (DPH), there were 1,378 confirmed drug overdose deaths in 2020, an increase of 14.6% from 2019. Of great concern, 85% of overdose deaths in 2020 were fentanyl-involved, an increase of 3% from 2019, signaling a crisis that is worsening. These developments highlight the need for continued collaboration, cooperation, and creativity in our approaches to reducing deaths from opioid overdose.

CHA also encourages the Committee to delete section 2 and incorporate that work into the charge of the task force to provide full stakeholder involvement in the development of the guidelines.

For these reasons, and as already noted, CHA and Connecticut hospitals support the bill and look forward to engaging in this important work.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.