



February 6, 2025

The Honorable Representative Susan R. Donovan
Chair of the House Committee on Health and Human Services
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for House Bill 5171 - Harm Reduction Pilot Program

Dear Chairwoman Donovan and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to express the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island's support for House Bill 5171, related to a harm reduction pilot program. We thank Representative Edwards for introducing this legislation.

Addiction is a mental illness. It is a treatable disorder, and relapse can be part of the recovery process for many people.¹ It may take multiple attempts before an individual maintains recovery.² That is why we must never lose hope that an individual, living in the darkest depths of an addiction, can recover and heal.

Harm reduction programs are evidenced-based health approaches. The Centers for Disease Control and Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) report that harm reduction programs save lives. They provide to individuals, who are using substances, tools such as syringes, Narcan and fentanyl test strips, as well as services and education. Harm reduction programs help ensure their safety before and between recovery attempts. Rhode Island's data bears this out. According to Prevent Overdose RI, overdose deaths have decreased each year since 2022.³ Governor McKee signed legislation permitting a harm reduction pilot program in July 2021.

¹ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/treatment-recovery>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31090945/>

³ <https://preventoverdoseri.org/overdose-deaths/>

In closing, the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island supports this legislation, which allows life-saving harm reduction programs to permanently operate in our state. Thank you for your consideration of our viewpoint. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Laurie-Marie Pisciotta

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