Tuesday, February 13, 2024

Dear Pennsylvania House of Representatives Judiciary Committee,

I urge you to vote for [HB1245](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/billInfo.cfm?sYear=2023&sInd=0&body=H&type=B&bn=1245) tomorrow, Feb. 14th.

I am an academic researcher, opioid policy expert, and a parent of a child who survived an overdose. As I [testified to this committee](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/CMS/ArchiveDetails.cfm?SessYear=2021&MeetingId=2002&Code=24&Chamber=H) in January 2022, my child, thankfully, had access to robust harm reduction services in a neighboring state. Yet here in South-Central Pennsylvania, other parents are attending funerals. Why? Every overdose death is a preventable death. We must fix the laws obstructing life-saving interventions in the Commonwealth.

This is **a bipartisan issue**—both red states and blue states have modernized their laws to explicitly authorize syringe service programs as a public health measure. Last session, you supported the bill I testified about -- Rep. Struzzi’s [HB1393](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/billinfo.cfm?syear=2021&sind=0&body=H&type=B&bn=1393) -- and it was enacted. That not only gave us a new overdose prevention tool, it also enabled us to *access federal funding* for drug-checking supplies. Please provide similar leadership now.

Pennsylvania counties are afraid to use their **opioid settlement funds** to support harm reduction programs, because of PA’s outdated drug laws. As a [pharma whistleblower](https://healthpolicynetwork.com/home/projects/), I helped fight to get settlement funds for the taxpayers. But to use these funds to save lives, we need to modernize our laws.

[Opioid settlement money is supposed to expand syringe services. A Pa. nonprofit just lost $150K because of them](https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2024/02/opioid-settlement-syringe-favor-cancelled/) (Feb. 5, 2024)

[Opioid settlement money is supposed to expand syringe services. Pa.’s drug laws stand in the way](https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2023/11/pennsylvania-opioid-settlement-syringe-services-harm-reduction/) (Nov.29, 2023)

Pennsylvania has one of the highest rates of overdose in the nation but remains one of the last (~10) states that do not allow statewide syringe service programs, a [critical tool for prevention](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7407057/).

Numerous studies are showing spikes in preventable injection-related diseases like HIV and hepatitis, [including in rural Pennsylvania](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8683873/). Your support of this bill can change that.

And finally, people who engage in SSPs are five times more likely to enter substance use treatment. Your support of HB1245 will help more people access treatment, the intervention that saved my child’s life.

I’m tired of rural Pennsylvanians lacking access to the comprehensive care programs available in ALL our neighboring states.

Thank you!

Gail Groves Scott, MPH

Director of Research and Advocacy

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