

HB1516 - UNFAVORABLE

To whom it may concern,

As you know, over the past few weeks the Washington County Health Department's Harm Reduction Program has come under attack from Delegate Parrott in regard to the services they provide to those with substance-use disorder. I have been following the reports and have watched his presentation to the commissioners. I am deeply concerned for the citizens of Washington County as the delegate has grossly misrepresented the care that the Harm Reduction Program provides. Harm Reduction is a program that is needed within our community. I am a healthcare provider and work with those who suffer from mental health and substance use disorders. This program not only allows them access to services that keep them from contracting a dangerous blood-borne disease, it also gives them people to connect them to services. Furthermore, those who work for Harm Reduction give this vulnerable population access to people who care about them and support them without judgement. One of the key factors in recovery from mental illness/substance-use disorder is a support system. Harm Reduction provides this to them when they feel they have no one else.

The delegate would have you believe that the "Just say no" campaign is the way to fight this crisis that we are in; however, decades of data speak to the contrary. Substance-use disorder is an illness that effects the physiology of the brain. Would we ask someone with bipolar disorder or depression to just stop acting manic or upset? No. We understand that these illnesses require medication and therapy to assist the patient to achieve long-term recovery. Substance-use disorder is no different. Those who suffer from substance-use disorder need the same type of care, and the Harm Reduction program can assist them with this.

Syringe services is one of the services provided through the Harm Reduction program. This service allows members of our community suffering from this disorder to have access to sterile injection equipment. Some find this a radical approach; however, this is a proven method, by the CDCs research, to decrease the transmission of blood-borne diseases. This is an essential part of assisting those with substance-use disorder into long-term recovery. As we know, HIV and Hepatitis C are life-long, incurable, and, sometimes, deadly diseases. Should we not protect all our community members from such things? There should be no discrimination as to who should and should not receive potential life-saving services.

It is my opinion that if we support Delegate Parrott in doing away with Harm Reduction's syringe services program, then what is next? Where do we draw the line that represents who can receive what services and when? I will use an example of what I hear most often about substance-use disorder, "Well it was their choice to do this so why should they receive sterile injection equipment?" As a healthcare provider I view this service and its patients no different than I would someone who presents to the emergency room having a heart attack due to obesity and a lifetime of a poor diet. Was it not that person's choice to eat poorly? Should they not have access to life-saving measures because it was "their choice"? What about the teenage boy who was street racing and wrecked his car? Should he not have access to life-saving services because it was "his choice" to race? I think we all know how we would answer these questions.

In conclusion, I ask that you please keep in mind that these community members are suffering from an illness. Also, please do not allow stigma, ignorance, and poor education to dictate what type of care is needed for this vulnerable population. Please think about if it was your loved one, would you not want them to have access to any service that could help save their

life and keep them from suffering from a life-long disease? Please do not allow Delegate Parrott to take this program away from those community members and their families who desperately need this service.

Sincerely,

A concerned nurse