

For Immediate Release

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HEARTLAND ALLIANCE
ENDING POVERTY

Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction Act Passes Illinois Senate

Bipartisan vote of 46-3 demonstrates strong support for overdose prevention and proven public health interventions that address the worst impacts of the opioid epidemic

Springfield, IL—With support from across the political spectrum, the Illinois Senate has approved **the Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction Act**, a critical measure needed to address the most devastating impacts of the opioid epidemic. Already the worst public health crisis of this generation, the opioid crisis has led to over 70,000 annual deaths nationwide, with Illinois experiencing almost 3,000 annual overdose deaths and the fastest rate of increase in overdose mortality in Midwest.

This legislation, sponsored by State Senator Melinda Bush (D-31) and supported by Heartland Alliance and other community advocates, seeks to address the worst effects of the opioid epidemic by legalizing needle exchange programs and promoting effective overdose prevention programs across the state.

“As overdose rates tragically continue to rise, we must do more to combat the opioid epidemic,” said Senator Bush. *“The initiatives in the Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction Act build on successful programs we have seen in Lake County and can make a real difference and save lives.”*

A primary element of the bill is legalizing needle exchange programs statewide.

“By joining 22 other states in authorizing needle exchange programs,” said Dan Rabbitt, health policy leader at Heartland Alliance, *“Illinois will support a proven public health intervention **to reduce the spread of blood borne illnesses like HIV, connect individuals to services, and prevent accidental overdose death.** These services are desperately needed, particularly in suburban and rural areas that have historically had no access to community-based harm reduction programs.”*

The new program would provide local health departments and other organizations who decide their communities need these services clarity on how to start a program and would provide those struggling with opioid addiction with safe and caring support until they are ready to consider treatment.

The bill also supports effective overdose prevention programming by directing the state to promote best practices and provide trainings to existing programs. The state has registered hundreds of overdose prevention programs but has not provided significant direction in the best methods of distributing naloxone (a safe and effective overdose reversal medication) and providing community education. Under this act, the state will do more to lift up innovative ideas and effective interventions such as street outreach and the use of peer recovery specialists.

Today represents a response to the opioid epidemic that demonstrates the urgency of the moment and is rooted in the evidence of what works. The Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction Act will save the lives of Illinoisans struggling with opioid addiction and allow them a path to recovery. More must be done to truly halt and reverse this public health emergency, but this bill takes a strong step in the right direction.

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Heartland Alliance for Human Rights and Human Needs is one of the Midwest’s leading antipoverty organizations, works in communities in the U.S. and abroad to serve those who are homeless, living in poverty, or seeking safety. It provides a comprehensive array of services in the areas of health, housing, jobs and justice – and leads state and national policy efforts, which target lasting change for individuals and society. Visit www.heartlandalliance.org for more.