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November 16, 2015

The Honorable Jennifer Flanagan
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse
State House Room 312D
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Elizabeth Malia
House Chair, Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse
State House Room 33
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H3817, *An Act relative to substance use treatment, education, and prevention*

Dear Chairwomen Flanagan and Malia:

As you well know, we are in the midst of a public health crisis in Massachusetts, with overdoses from heroin and prescription opioids continuing to climb and communities across our state suffering the devastating ripple effects. The opiate epidemic, which takes four lives each day in our state, demands immediate and bold action.

That is what Governor Baker has given us in H3817. His proposal is a great example of the kind of outside-the-box thinking that we need to be doing right now as a state. The bill takes a comprehensive approach, suggesting solutions that address the problem in a number of ways.

First, the bill seeks to end the overprescribing of opioids in Massachusetts, through education requirements for prescribers, increasing use of the state Prescription Monitoring Program, and setting a 72-hour limit on most opioid prescriptions. In 2014, health care providers in this state wrote 4.4 million prescriptions for a schedule II or schedule III drug, which resulted in 240 million pills being dispensed – enough for every man, woman, child, and infant in Massachusetts to have a 30-day prescription. Globally, the United States is less than 5% of the world's population, but we consume 80% of the world's opioid supply. Not only does overprescribing cause addiction to prescription opioids, it also results in addiction to heroin; four out of five heroin users report that they started with prescription drugs. If we are serious about addressing addiction, we must do more to eliminate inappropriate opioid prescriptions. I know the Massachusetts Department of Public Health will work closely with the medical community to



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implement and refine the Governor's proposed limitation, and I believe there are other prescribing safeguards we should consider as well.

Second, the bill focuses on education, prevention, and recovery. We know that 74% of people with a substance use disorder began that substance use at the age of 17 or younger, which makes reaching young people particularly important. Governor Baker's proposal would increase trainings in schools and improve access to recovery high schools for those who are struggling with addiction. It would also enlist insurance carriers to help with preventative education by requiring them to file each year with the Division of Insurance information about the work they are doing to educate their members and providers about the risks of opioids and to ensure that alternative pain management therapies are available.

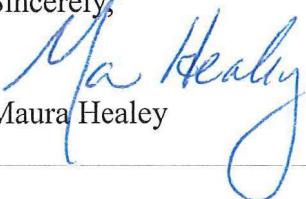
Third, the bill seeks to improve pathways to treatment. A recent study found that just one-sixth of people with an opioid addiction actually receive treatment. We need to do better at giving people immediate access to recovery options and resources, particularly after an overdose. While we would need to significantly expand the capacity of our treatment system in order to implement Governor Baker's emergency admission proposal, I believe this is a solution worth exploring further with our hospitals and treatment providers, among others.

Now, we must work as a team to figure out the best way to implement these innovative ideas. My office is committed to playing an active role in that process, alongside the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Legislature, and a variety of stakeholders across the medical and public health fields. As we engage in that process, I believe we should also look to some of the important provisions outlined in S. 2022, *An Act relative to substance use prevention.*

Tackling this epidemic requires creative and aggressive solutions. I appreciate Governor Baker's action and I look forward to working with his administration and with you and your colleagues to advance the concepts outlined in this bill.

Thank you and the members of the Joint Committee for considering these comments as you review H3817. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Joanna Lydgate, Director of Policy, at (617) 963-2955.

Sincerely,


Maura Healey