

The Connecticut General Assembly



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Public Health Committee Unveils Major Opioid Prescription Law

Public Health Committee co-chairs Sen. Terry Gerratana (D-New Britain) and Rep. Matt Ritter (D-Hartford) joined with Rep. Sean Scanlon (D-Guilford) and Rep. Theresa Conroy (D-Seymour) on Monday to call for the passage of SB 352, An Act Concerning Prescriptions for and the Dispensing of Opioid Antagonists, which would limit first time adult opioid prescriptions for non-chronic pain to a seven day supply and limit all prescriptions for minors to a seven day supply in which case the prescribing practitioner must discuss the risks associated with opioids with the minor's parent or guardian.

"Connecticut, like many other states throughout the country, is facing epidemic levels of opioid drug abuse and addiction. No community is safe from this threat," said **Senator Gerratana**, Senate Chair of the Public Health Committee. "We are passing this bill today because no family should have to suffer this kind of pain. Deaths from drug overdoses, many of them caused by misuse of prescription opioids, have become the leading cause of injury death in the United States. We are in the midst of a public health crisis, and swift action is needed to help reverse this alarming trend."

Last week, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention advised doctors to refrain from giving opioid prescriptions to patients suffering from non-chronic pain, stating that the risks for such patients include addiction and death. According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, **four in five new heroin users started out misusing prescription painkillers**. The majority of people who become addicted to prescription painkillers do not do so intentionally or following the orders of a doctor. In fact, according to the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 50.5% of people who misused prescription painkillers got them from a friend or a relative for free versus 22.1% who got them from a doctor. Experts point to the over-prescribing of opioids – in 2012, 259 million prescriptions were written for opioids, enough to give every American adult their own bottle of pills – as one of the leading causes of our current crisis.

If passed, SB 352 and limited all adult first-time opiate prescriptions to a 7 day supply would represent a groundbreaking development in the fight against prescription drug abuse. The current cap on first time prescriptions in Connecticut is a 30 day supply. If passed, SB 352 would make Connecticut only the second state in the United States to limit prescriptions to one week for non-chronic pain.

“Opioid addiction is a public health crisis in our state and across the country,” **Rep. Ritter** said. “We know that for many people, that addiction begins with taking legally prescribed pain killers. This legislation ensures that people who receive pain killers for a routine medical event aren’t being prescribed double or triple the amount they need. We have an opportunity through this bill to save lives by preventing many new cases of opioid addiction.”

According to data made available by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, there has been a significantly increasing rise in overdoses related to opioids and heroin in Connecticut. From 2014 to 2015, heroin deaths increased by 27 percent in Connecticut and of the 723 people who died of an overdose in 2015, 415 of those were heroin-related and another 107 were related to fentanyl, a powerful opiate that drug dealers have begun lacing heroin with to make it more potent.

"Today when a young person gets their wisdom teeth removed or an adult has minor surgery, they may get 50-60 of these powerful pills from their doctor and only end up using 5-6 of them," said **Rep. Scanlon**. "More often than not, these excess pills wind up in the wrong hands whether it's the patient innocently giving them to a friend or someone seeking them finds them in a medicine cabinet. This surplus of pain pills in our society is the number one identified source of our current crisis and with this legislation we are taking a monumental step forward in our fight against the prescription drug and heroin abuse epidemic."

“Connecticut has recognized that the opioid epidemic is a public health crisis,” **Rep. Conroy** added. “Prescription painkillers are often the first step on a path to devastating addiction.”

“By significantly reducing the amount of unnecessary opiates being prescribed will alleviate the misuse of unused pills falling into the wrong hands, drastically reducing the addiction and overdose rate,” **Sue Kruczek**, a Guilford mother who lost her son to a heroin overdose in 2013 said. “I fully believe my son Nick would be with us today if this bill was in place. This would save the "Nicks" of the future.”