**Testimony of Victoria Veltri**

**State Healthcare Advocate**

**Before the General Law Committee**

**In support of HB 5782 & HB 5784**

**February 17, 2015**

Good afternoon, Representative Baram, Senator Leone, Senator Witkos, Representative Carter, and members of the General Law Committee. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, State Healthcare Advocate with the Office Healthcare Advocate ("OHA"). OHA is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

I would like to express my support for HB 5782, An Act Allowing Pharmacists To Dispense Or Administer An Opioid Antagonist To Treat Or Prevent A Drug Overdose. This bill begins to address the growing problem in our state and nation of substance abuse and addiction to opioid drugs. Nearly 120 million Americans struggle to manage their chronic pain, with an estimated annual cost of $635 billion in both medical costs and decreased work productivity.[1] Opioid analgesics are a highly effective treatment option for these individuals. However, the risk for abuse of these medications is significant. Rates of drug abuse in our nation quadrupled between 1990 and 2000, and the rate of deaths due to drug abuse more than doubled from 1999 to 2013.[2]

In response to this increasing trend, easing barriers to highly effective and safe treatments against opioid drug overdoses can significantly increase the chance of survival for individuals who have overdosed on opioid drugs.

The concept promoted by HB 5782 is not new. New Mexico, Washington, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont and California already have enacted laws making opioid antagonists available from pharmacists without a prescription, and the Drug Policy Alliance actively supports such an initiative as a crucial tool in the fight against opioid abuse and resulting fatalities. Permitting pharmacists to play a role in these initiatives acknowledges their level of expertise and training, and provides another ally in this crisis that costs our state and nation countless lives each year.

HB 5784, An Act Concerning Pharmacists And Abuse-Deterrent Opioid Prescriptions, addresses a related issue in this crisis – the growing incidents of addiction. The availability of opioids and the ease with which people become addicted to these medications, whether obtained legitimately or not, is fueling the crisis. The increasing availability of alternate opioid medications with abuse-deterrent properties can help to mitigate this risk. HB 5784 seeks to ensure that an individual can continue their prescribed course of treatment with an opioid that has abuse deterrent properties, as ordered by their treating provider who undoubtedly has the greatest insight into the patient's risks, needs and condition. As costs and insurance plan designs increasingly seek to reduce costs by promoting cheaper alternatives, this can result in consumers bring driven to use a non-abuse deterrent opioid for treatment, increasing the risk of abuse and addiction, with all of the associated health, social and economic impacts. HB 5784 promotes the provider's treatment plan and access to these abuse deterrent opioids, a concept that has been championed by the FDA, CDC, SAMHSA, as well as two of the pharmaceutical industries largest trade groups[3] and the members of the U.S. Senate[4].

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver OHA's testimony today. We look forward to continuing to collaborate and advocate for the consumers of Connecticut in this important matter.
If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at victoria.veltri@ct.gov.

---

1 http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3411218/" \l "b1-ptj3707412

2 http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/overdose/facts.html

3 http://raps.org/Regulatory-Focus/News/2015/01/20/21120/Should-FDA-Pull-Non-Abuse-Deterrent-Generic-Opioids-off-the-Market-PhRMA-Bio-Say-Yes/

4 http://www.raps.org/regulatoryDetail.aspx?id=18578