



March 31, 2019

Hon. Committee Members:

I am writing in support of the passage of House Bill 19-1263, Concerning Changing the Penalty for Certain Violations Pursuant to the "Uniform Controlled Substances Act of 2013".

I have been a practicing physician for 37 years and for the past six years my practice has been almost exclusively devoted to treating persons suffering from substance use disorders. I am currently the Director of the Medication Assisted Treatment Program at the Stout Street Health Center of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and on the front line of the current substance abuse epidemic.

Passage of this bill is a step towards an evidence-based practice for the treatment of those suffering from substance use disorders, particularly opioid use disorder. If the current model of felony incarceration for possession of substances of abuse was a successful strategy, we would not have 55% to 80% of those imprisoned incarcerated for either possession of illicit substances or crimes related to the use of illicit substances. We clearly cannot arrest our way out of this crisis.

It is important to understand that virtually all substance use disorders originate in histories of trauma in those who are afflicted. This trauma may be early childhood trauma; or it may be the trauma of living in poverty and lack of belief in a future; or it may be the trauma of domestic violence; or it may be the legacy of generations of racism; and, even the trauma of previous incarceration.

The person arrested for possession of an illicit substance is the end person in a long chain of transgenerational trauma. The young child who is traumatized by a parent or other relative is the victim of a perpetrator who was most often a victim themselves of a parent or other relative. When this person is arrested and incarcerated we are simply punishing the person who himself or herself is one in a long series of traumatized persons.

Our modern understanding of substance use disorders is that these are acquired disorders of the brain that result in functional and structural changes having their origins in vulnerabilities to substances of abuse including opioids, alcohol, cocaine, and methamphetamine. These vulnerabilities are the result of the aforementioned. Substance use disorders are chronic relapsing disorders that need to be treated in the same way we would treat any other chronic disease such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, etc.

The age of blaming the person for having a moral failure needs to be laid to rest and replaced by a modern and scientifically-based understanding of substance use disorders as chronic illnesses. These should be treated with appropriate medications as well as behavioral interventions. Most require by their very nature lifelong treatment by one modality or another.

Please pass this bill for the sake of those who suffer and guide them towards treatment rather than incarceration.

Sincerely,

Rollin V. Oden, MD, MPH, FASAM

2130 Stout Street Denver, CO 80205
Tel: 303-293-2220
www.coloradocoalition.org