

March 20, 2019

Members, House Committee on Health Care
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, Oregon

Re: House Bill 3273 and Disposal of Opioids

Dear Chair Salinas, Vice Chair Hayden, Vice Chair Nosse and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dwight Holton, I am the Chief Executive Officer of Lines for Life – a nonprofit dedicated to preventing substance abuse and suicide. Lines for Life is home to the Oregon Coalition for Responsible Use of Meds, a statewide task force launched by the Governor’s Office and the OHA back in 2013 to help tackle the growing opioid crisis. I also serve on the Governor’s Opioid Task Force and the Governor’s Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission.

I apologize that I cannot be with you today, I am in Pendleton serving as host for the Eastern Oregon Conference on Opioids, Pain and Addiction Treatment.

I write to offer my unqualified support for HB 3273, the Safe Disposal Act for Opioids.

I support this legislation for one reason: I have met too many people who have lost loved ones to overdose by opioid painkillers.

- We know that the opioids in our medicine cabinets are fueling addiction.
- We know that the opioids in our medicine cabinets are killing people.
- We know that the opioids in our medicine cabinets are being misused by our children.
- We know that we can provide for safe, easy disposal of opioids
- And most importantly, we know that we can save lives with safe, effective disposal.

The standard we should set is simple: it should be as easy to get rid of leftover painkillers as it is to get them in the first place. Safe disposal of opioids:

- Reduces the risk of accidental overdose
- Reduces the risk of addiction to prescription painkillers
- Reduces the risk of heroin addiction
- Reduces the prevalence of opioids in our streams, rivers and water supply
- Increases patient awareness of the risk of opioid addiction

And that is why we must demand that it be as easy to get rid of your opioids as it is to get them in the first place -- and that is what this bill delivers.

The facts of the opioid crisis are devastating. 42,000 people died from opioid overdose in the U.S. last year. That's one person every 14 minutes. If you've been in this committee room for an hour, we've lost four people.

The deaths are of course the tip of the iceberg. For every person who dies by overdose, thousands of families are wracked with the challenges of addiction – the emotional damage, the distraction from work and community and family, and the crises in health that come with addiction.

Prescription painkillers left in our medicine cabinets are fueling this crisis. Nearly one in five teens reported that they have used prescription medication to get high and study after study has revealed that most teens get these medications from friends or family members. About two-thirds of all prescriptions remain unused, and when surveyed, over half of patients reported storing leftover medications in their home instead of disposing of them. Over 220 million opioid pills are prescribed in Oregon each year, leaving tens of millions of disused pills in Oregon homes.

We are making important progress in Oregon. We are among the few states in the Union where opioid overdose deaths have stabilized – for now. We in Oregon have declared an all hands-on deck approach to addressing this crisis – public and private sectors are working together, from law enforcement to rural providers to public health and prevention agencies like Lines for Life. And our all-hands-on-deck approach has meant important and pathbreaking public policy – including nation-leading efforts on improving access to pain treatment, addiction treatment and safer prescribing.

HB 3273 is a critical next step in our efforts to meet the opioid crisis head-on.

The fact is that the leftover pain pills in our medicine cabinet pose a grave and certain risk. The risk of addiction is staggering. According to a study by researchers at the University of Washington,

- if you take opioids like oxycontin or Vicodin for just 30 days, there is a 47% likelihood that you will *still* be on those opioids 3 years later, and
- if you take opioid painkillers for 90 days, there is a 60% risk that you will still be on these opioids in 5 years!

And not only do leftover pain pills pose a serious risk of addiction themselves, these pills also present a serious risk of addiction to heroin. The Centers for Disease Control report that 3 out of 4 people who use heroin report having first used prescription opioids.

It's also imperative to understand that safe disposal not only makes it easier to get these risky drugs out of our homes – we have research which demonstrates that safe, pharmacy-based disposal **actually serves to effectively educate pharmacy customers about the risk of opioid addiction and abuse.** Specifically, Portland State University last year studied six Oregon pharmacies – three with Rx disposal boxes, three without. Surveying customers of these pharmacies, researchers determined that customers at pharmacies with disposal boxes (1) better understood the risks of prescription painkillers, and (2) better understood the importance of safe disposal of opioids. The study verifies what we know from common experience: when pharmacies have a disposal box, the pharmacist – when she hands you your painkillers – will tell you “when you're done with these, the extra go in that disposal box – that's the safe thing to do.”

In sum, you can make an important difference in combating the opioid crisis today – this act will save lives and spare families the devastation of addiction. Disposal is safe, effective and easy – especially when pharmacy based. I urge you to support HB 3273.

Most respectfully,



Dwight C. Holton
Chief Executive Officer