



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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Vice Chair
Joint Committee on Higher Education

Committees:
Environment and Natural Resources
State Administration
and Regulatory Oversight
Elder Affairs

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Representative Marjorie C. Decker, Chair
Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 130
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Julian Cyr, Chair
Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Decker and Chair Cyr,

I write to you in support of H.2184 and S.1435, An Act authorizing pharmacists to provide opioid use disorder treatment, which are currently before the Joint Committee on Public Health. This legislation would allow pharmacists in a retail setting, who have a collaborative practice agreement, to issue prescriptions for schedule II-VI controlled substances. In practice, this would allow individuals suffering from opioid use disorder to receive life-saving treatment from their local pharmacist.

The opioid epidemic is one of the greatest public health challenges facing Massachusetts. In 2021, the most recent year to have complete data, [2,585 people died in the Commonwealth](#) from opioid-related overdoses. Of those individuals, 25% were Black and Hispanic persons, a number far greater than their 11% share of all deaths in the Commonwealth. Although medications such as buprenorphine and methadone are safe and effective at treating addiction and preventing overdoses, [87 percent of people with opioid use disorder](#) never receive any medication treatment.

One reason for these sobering statistics is the fact that help is rarely accessible on demand. When patients call or visit a clinic looking for help, they may not receive treatment for weeks. Much time and energy has been spent in Massachusetts discussing strategies to boost staffing in key fields such as nursing and direct care. While these are important discussions, we must also recognize that pharmacists provide a willing and able body of medical professionals that could help immediately.

In the status quo, Massachusetts allows collaborative practice agreements, in which a physician and pharmacist agree to cooperate on providing care and certain activities. The Commonwealth also allows pharmacists in hospitals and other health care institutions to prescribe controlled substances such as buprenorphine, a low-potency medication prescribed to reduce cravings for high-potency and dangerous opioids. The legislation would essentially extend this ability to pharmacists in other settings.

This bill was inspired by [a study in Rhode Island](#), where researchers partnered with Genoa Healthcare, a national chain that runs pharmacies inside or near community behavioral health centers. During the first visit, Genoa pharmacists spent an hour, on average, getting to know the participant, taking notes on their medical and drug histories, and assessing their state of withdrawal. Then the pharmacist called a nurse or doctor. [The study found](#) that patients were 72% more likely to continue treatment for a

month than patients who received the same care in an outpatient program. Although just a pilot study, that Rhode Island program saved lives from overdoses by giving people an accessible alternative to street drugs such as Fentanyl. Genoa operates eleven locations in Massachusetts and could relatively easily provide this treatment here too.

Simply put, our Commonwealth ought to be creating as many opportunities as possible for individuals to access care. This model worked in Rhode Island, and it has worked outside the United States in places such Canada, Australia and Scotland. Pharmacists are in the communities where our people who need help live and work. We ought to cut the red tape that is preventing them from helping.

Thank you for consideration of this written testimony and my request that the committee report this legislation favorably.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carmine L. Gentile", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Carmine L. Gentile
State Representative
13th Middlesex District