

THE
CHRIS  ATWOOD
FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 9282 Reston, Virginia 20195
www.TheCAF.org

The Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor, The Commonwealth of Virginia
Post Office Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Cc: The Honorable Daniel Carey, M.D.

Re: Virginia's Law on Comprehensive Harm Reduction Programs

Dear Governor Northam:

I write to you today on behalf of the Chris Atwood Foundation, whose mission is to save lives from opioid overdose, and ask for your support of the Expanded Comprehensive Harm Reduction Act, a bill that would re-authorize, strengthen and ensure continued operation of Virginia's comprehensive harm reduction programs (CHRP) under Virginia Code Ann. §32.1-45.4. to address the growing opioid crisis. Absent action by the General Assembly, Virginia's authorizing law for CHRPs will sunset on July 1, 2020, taking away critical resources for many Virginians battling addiction.

For more than 30 years, CHRPs across more than 39 states – including Virginia – have helped reduce the negative impacts of drug use such as disease, overdose and death by providing overdose reversal medication, treatment referrals, disease testing, and facilitating the safe distribution and collection of hypodermic needles and syringes. The benefits of such programs are clear: in addition to reducing the spread of HIV and other diseases in Virginia, CHRP participants are **five times** more likely to enter treatment because the programs provide an opportunity for trained personnel to provide information regarding treatment.

While it is critical that Virginia's CHRP programs be re-authorized, we also have an opportunity to strengthen Virginia's CHRPs to enable them to help *more* constituents in need. That's exactly what the Comprehensive Harm Reduction Act would do.

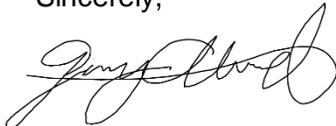
Today, Virginia only has four approved CHRPs serving only 550 of the estimated 25,000 Virginians in need, representing *merely* 2.2% of constituents. In contrast, North Carolina's harm reduction programs serve more than 10,000 individuals annually. The reason for this is simple: Virginia's current CHRP law only allows programs in certain localities. It also requires organizations to navigate a burdensome approval process that limits CHRP start-up. As a result, organizations face unintended barriers that limit the ability of these programs to form and serve individuals in need. To remedy this, we have modeled the Expanded Comprehensive Harm Reduction Act after North Carolina's successful law.

In addition to removing the sunset provision of Virginia Code Ann. §32.1-45.4, the Expanded Comprehensive Harm Reduction Act would remove these barriers for CHRPs while preserving oversight authority of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). Specifically, the bill would:

- authorize governmental or nongovernmental organizations that promote scientifically proven ways of mitigating health risks associated with drug use and other high-risk behaviors to operate a Comprehensive Harm Reduction program anywhere in Virginia;
- require that such programs be designed to reduce needlestick injuries to law enforcement as well as the spread of HIV and other diseases, facilitate naloxone distribution, and encourage individuals who inject drugs to enroll in treatment and return used hypodermic needles for safe disposal;
- provide reasonable and adequate security of program sites, equipment, and personnel, with security plans provided to local police and sheriff's offices;
- require that CHRPs report to VDH every 12 months on the number of individuals served, the number of naloxone kits distributed, and other metrics; and
- provide immunity from prosecution for (1) volunteers, employees, or participants of CHRPs for possession of needles or other injection supplies obtained from or returned to a program or for residual amounts of a controlled substance contained in a used needle, and (2) law enforcement personnel that, in good faith, arrest or charge such immunized individuals.

For the past six years, our foundation – named for my brother Chris Atwood, who died of a heroin overdose in 2013 – has worked to prevent overdose deaths. The CHRP law provides critical resources for many Virginians battling addiction, and most importantly, it helps save lives. We ask that you help us in this cause by supporting the Expanded Comprehensive Harm Reduction Act in the upcoming legislative session.

Sincerely,



Ginny Atwood Lovitt
Executive Director
The Chris Atwood Foundation

This bill is proudly supported by:

AIDS United

Harm Reduction Coalition

Virginia Grassroots Coalition

Beth O'Connor, Executive Director, Virginia Rural Health Association

Lawson Koeppel, Executive Director, Virginia Harm Reduction Coalition

Honesty Liller, CEO, McShin Foundation

Kathy Harke, Executive Director, Substance Abuse and Recovery Alliance

Hugo Delgado, Executive Director, NovaSalud

Andrew Pavord, Founder, Virginia Recovery Coalition

Karen Legato, Executive Director, Health Brigade

Chelsea Dobert-Kehn, Harm Reduction Coordinator, Queer Appalachia

Jordan McNeish, Founder, Jefferson Area Harm Reduction