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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 19-H 5545
AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY – HARM REDUCTION CENTER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
AND PILOT PROGRAM
March 20, 2019

The ACLU is highly supportive of H 5545, which would authorize a pilot program for harm reduction centers in Rhode Island and establish an advisory committee for its implementation.

Harm reduction clinics play a critical role in acknowledging that a major step for recovery is a supportive environment which prioritizes patient autonomy and safety. Drug addictions do not follow a universal and predictable pattern, and rather than condemning or criminalizing substance abuse disorder, these clinics provide a supportive environment for those who need access to rehabilitative or medical resources.

However, we believe that, in establishing a pilot program, the legislation must address an issue which is essential for a harm reduction center to serve its purpose and ensure that those with substance use disorders feel comfortable making use of them. Specifically, as with the goal of the state's Good Samaritan law, the bill needs to make clear that the center will be a safe haven, and that those making use of it need not fear law enforcement encroachment or criminal consequences emanating from their patronizing such a facility.

Another bill up for discussion today, H 5551, would establish publicly available naloxone in order to combat public overdoses. We are also supportive of this legislation and believe that the establishment of harm reduction clinics has a complimentary role in ensuring that those who are unable or unprepared to confront their addiction have safety measures available to them.

Thank you for your consideration.