

Testimony in Support of Michigan House Bills HB 5178, HB 5371, and HB 5372

Honorable members of the Behavioral Health Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bills HB 5178, HB 5371, and HB 5372. These bills represent a comprehensive approach to addressing critical public health issues in Michigan, including the opioid epidemic, HIV transmission among individuals who inject drugs, and the accessibility and quality of behavioral health services in the State of Michigan.

House Bill 5178: Syringe Service Programs

HB 5178 aims to expand syringe service programs (SSPs), which have proven to be highly effective in reducing the transmission of HIV and other bloodborne diseases among individuals who inject drugs. Here are three compelling reasons why this bill should be passed:

1. **Reduction in HIV Transmission:** SSPs have a well-documented history of reducing the transmission of HIV among drug users. By providing clean syringes, these programs significantly decrease the likelihood of needle sharing, which is a primary vector for HIV transmission. Studies have shown that communities with robust SSPs see a marked reduction in new HIV cases, which translates to lower healthcare costs and healthier populations. SSPs are low cost high impact public health programs. I have personal experience as a former public health official in the City of Detroit Health Department who oversaw the communicable disease, substance use disorder and Ryan White programs. The transmission of Hepatitis B & C through the sharing of syringes will also be significantly reduced with SSP programs.
2. **Combating the Opioid Epidemic:** In addition to providing clean syringes, many SSPs, including the Detroit Recovery Project in Detroit, MI, distribute naloxone (Narcan), a life-saving medication that can reverse opioid overdoses. This dual approach not only addresses the immediate risk of overdose deaths but also opens a pathway to treatment and recovery for individuals with substance use disorders. By incorporating Narcan distribution, SSPs play a critical role in mitigating the impact of the opioid crisis in Michigan.
3. **Engagement and Support for Vulnerable Populations:** SSPs often serve as the first point of contact between healthcare providers and marginalized populations. By offering clean syringes and other services, these programs create opportunities to engage individuals who might otherwise be disconnected from the healthcare system. This engagement can lead to referrals for addiction treatment, mental health services, and other critical health interventions, ultimately fostering better overall health outcomes. SSPs should be allowed to operate without the fear of legal consequences.

House Bills 5371 and 5372: Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)

HB 5371 and HB 5372 focus on establishing and expanding Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) across Michigan. CCBHCs represent a new model for delivering comprehensive behavioral health services, including mental health and substance use disorder treatment. Here are three reasons why these bills are crucial:

1. **Comprehensive Care Model:** CCBHCs provide a holistic approach to behavioral health care, integrating mental health services, substance use treatment, and primary care. This model ensures that individuals receive coordinated and comprehensive care, addressing the full spectrum of their health needs. By adopting this model, Michigan can improve health outcomes for individuals with complex and co-occurring conditions.
2. **Financial Stability and Sustainability:** The proposed funding mechanism for CCBHCs in HB 5371 and HB 5372 will ensure financial stability and sustainability for these clinics. Stable funding allows CCBHCs to offer a consistent and high-quality level of care, invest in long-term planning, and attract and retain skilled healthcare professionals. This stability is essential for maintaining the capacity to meet the growing demand for behavioral health services.
3. **Access to Services for Vulnerable Populations:** CCBHCs are designed to be accessible to all individuals, regardless of their ability to pay. They serve as a critical resource for underserved and vulnerable populations, including low-income individuals, the uninsured, and those living in rural areas. By expanding the network of CCBHCs, Michigan can significantly improve access to behavioral health services for these populations, addressing disparities in health care and promoting equity.

In conclusion, the passage of HB 5178, HB 5371, and HB 5372 is essential for improving public behavioral health outcomes in Michigan. These bills address the urgent need to continue to reduce HIV transmission, combat the opioid epidemic, and provide comprehensive, accessible behavioral health care. I urge the Behavioral Health Committee to support these measures and help create a healthier, more equitable Michigan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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