

# VOICES FOR NON-OPIOID CHOICES

*February 28, 2025*

**Chair Ed Buttrey**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
Montana State Capitol  
1301 E 6th Ave  
Helena, MT 59601

**Vice Chair Kerri Seekins-Crowe**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
Montana State Capitol  
1301 E 6th Ave  
Helena, MT 59601

**The Honorable Scott DeMarois**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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1301 E 6th Ave  
Helena, MT 59601

**The Honorable Steve Fitzpatrick**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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**The Honorable Jamie Isaly**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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**Vice Chair Jennifer Lynch**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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**The Honorable Bob Carter**

House Business and Labor Committee  
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**The Honorable Chip Fitzpatrick**

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**The Honorable Steve Gist**

House Business and Labor Committee  
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**The Honorable Jonathan Karlen**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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**The Honorable Brandon Ler**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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**The Honorable Shannon Maness,**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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**The Honorable Ron Marshall**

House Business and Labor Committee  
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**The Honorable Nelly Nicol**

House Business and Labor Committee  
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**The Honorable Greg Oblander**

House Business and Labor Committee  
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**The Honorable Curtis Schomer**

House Business and Labor Committee  
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**The Honorable Joshua Seckinger**

House Business and Labor Committee  
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**The Honorable Courtenay Sprunger**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
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**The Honorable Katie Sullivan**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
Montana State Capitol  
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**The Honorable Morgan Thiel**

House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana Legislature  
Montana State Capitol  
1301 E 6th Ave  
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Dear Chair Buttrey and Members of the Montana House Business and Labor Committee,

Thank you for holding this hearing on critical legislation that will benefit individuals across Montana. I am writing in strong support of Montana House Bill 774 and urge its swift passage to help prevent opioid addiction in the state.

My name is Chris Fox, and I am the Executive Director of Voices for Non-Opioid Choices ("Voices"). Voices applauds Vice Chair Seekins-Crowe for introducing HB 774, which takes

important steps to reduce opioid addiction by expanding access to non-opioid pain management options. We fully support this legislation and its efforts to ensure Montanans have safer alternatives for pain treatment.

For too long, our response to the opioid addiction crisis focused solely on opioid overdose death prevention. Such a focus misses the opportunity to prevent addiction where we can, including by reducing and minimizing unnecessary exposure to opioids. One opportunity to do this is to increase the availability of non-opioid pain management approaches. In doing so, HB 774 will prevent opioid addiction for many Montanans and save lives.

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices ([www.nonopioidchoices.org](http://www.nonopioidchoices.org)) is a national, non-partisan, and nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC dedicated to preventing opioid addiction. Our coalition boasts over 20,000 advocates and 200 member organizations from across the country representing the leading patient, provider, and public health advocacy organizations. All told, Voices' members represent millions of Americans affected by the U.S. opioid epidemic.

Despite years of attention to combatting the opioid epidemic, the crisis persists. Last year, we lost 81,000 Americans to an opioid-related drug overdose.<sup>i</sup> This means that, on average, **we lose more than 200 Americans every day to an opioid-related drug overdose.**

Montana is not immune from this national epidemic. In 2023, there were **120 opioid-related overdose deaths**, accounting for **72.7% of all drug overdose fatalities** in the state.<sup>ii</sup> For many, the path towards addiction begins after being prescribed opioids to manage an acute pain incident, such as for postsurgical pain, an accident, or sports injury. In Montana, there were **40.4 opioid prescriptions written for every 100 persons** in 2023.<sup>iii</sup>

Fortunately, this is a path to addiction that can be prevented by ensuring access to non-opioid approaches.

Prescription opioids are frequently used to treat acute pain. In fact, as many as **90 percent of all surgical patients** in the United States receive a prescription for opioids to manage postsurgical pain.<sup>iv</sup> It is easy to understand why prescription opioids are frequently used – medical professionals are trained to treat pain with opioids, they are seen as effective ways to treat pain, and, perhaps most importantly, generic prescription opioids are incredibly cheap. As such, health insurers frequently make generic opioids available to patients at little – or no – charge to the patient.

**This inadvertently incentivizes patients – and their healthcare providers – to treat pain with prescription opioids. We must change this care paradigm.**

HB 774 ensures equal access to opioid and nonopioid pain management treatments by prohibiting Medicaid and commercial insurance plans from disadvantaging or discouraging coverage for nonopioid drugs.

HB 774 would not put prescription opioids out-of-reach for those patients who want – or require – those treatments. Rather, the legislation would ensure that Montanans would have full access to the full suite of safe, effective, and FDA-approved pain management approaches, including both opioid and non-opioid options.

The legislation being considered today mirrors a federal bill, the Alternatives to Prevent Addiction in the Nation (Alternatives to PAIN) Act, which was recently reintroduced in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress (H.R.1227/S.575). **Simply put, we must ensure that all patients can easily access non-opioid pain approaches across all care settings.**

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices urges the federal and state government to continue to work hand-in-hand to solve the opioid crisis currently taking place in Montana, and throughout the country. For too long, prescription opioids have been the default method for managing pain – and insurance company practices have reinforced this reality. This puts patients at unnecessary risk for misuse and addiction.

Voices applauds the advancements proposed in HB 774. This bill would enable more patients to have access to non-addictive products and would improve care for the tens of thousands of Montanans who experience an acute pain incident every year.

Once again, thank you for making the time today to recognize and examine the importance of expanding access to non-addictive opioid alternatives throughout Montana. I urge the committee to take action to prevent opioid addiction before it starts and pass HB 774.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. I stand ready to work with your committee and the full delegation to prevent opioid addiction and enact this important legislation. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [chris@nonopioidchoices.org](mailto:chris@nonopioidchoices.org).

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Fox".

Chris Fox  
Executive Director  
Voices for Non-Opioid Choices

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<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024). US Overdose Deaths Decrease in 2023, First Time Since 2018. [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2024/20240515.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2024/20240515.htm)

<sup>ii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024). SUDORS Dashboard: Fatal Drug Overdose Data. <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/sudors-dashboard-fatal-overdose-data.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2024). Opioid Dispensing Rate Maps. <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/data-research/facts-stats/opioid-dispensing-rate-maps.html>

<sup>iv</sup> Singh, K., Murali, A., Stevens, H., Vydiswaran, V. G. V., Bohnert, A., Brummett, C. M., & Fernandez, A. C. (2022). Predicting persistent opioid use after surgery using electronic health record and patient-reported data. *Surgery*, 172(1), 241–248. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.surg.2022.01.008>