



January 20, 2024

Chair Dan Bronoske (D-28)

House Health Care & Wellness Committee
House of Representatives
Washington State Legislature
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Vice Chair Alicia Rule (D-42)

House Health Care & Wellness Committee
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Vice Chair Debra Lekanoff (D-40)

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Ranking Member Joe Schmick (R-09)

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**Assistant Ranking Member Michelle
Caldier (R-26)**

House Health Care & Wellness Committee
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The Honorable Matt Marshall (R-02)

House Health Care & Wellness Committee
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The Honorable Lauren Davis (D-32)

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The Honorable Andrew Engell (R-07)

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The Honorable Sam Low (R-39)

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The Honorable Nicole Macri (D-43)

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The Honorable Deb Manjarrez (R-14)

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The Honorable Edwin Obras (D-33)

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The Honorable Lisa Parshley (D-22)

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The Honorable Clyde Shavers (D-10)

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The Honorable Tarra Simmons (D-23)

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The Honorable Monica Stonier (D-49)

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The Honorable David Stuebe (R-17)

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The Honorable My-Linh Thai (D-41)

House Health Care & Wellness Committee
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The Honorable Steve Tharinger (D-24)

House Health Care & Wellness Committee
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Dear Members of the Washington House Health Care & Wellness Committee,

Thank you for holding a hearing on important legislation benefiting individuals across Washington. Voices for Non-Opioid Choices (“Voices”) applauds Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self (D-21B) for introducing Washington House Bill 1034 to prevent opioid addiction in Washington. Voices would like to extend our full support for HB 1034 and urge swift action – and approval – of this bill.

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices (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.

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 1034 will prevent opioid addiction for many Washingtonians and save lives.

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.ⁱ This means that, on average, **we lose more than 220 Americans every day to an opioid-related drug overdose.**

Washington is not immune from this national epidemic. In 2023, there were **2,783 opioid-related overdose deaths**, accounting for **83.3% of all drug overdose fatalities** in the state.ⁱⁱ 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 Washington, there were **34.5 opioid prescriptions written for every 100 persons** in 2023.ⁱⁱⁱ

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.^{iv} 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 1034 would do just this. This legislation requires equitable insurance coverage for FDA-approved non-opioid pain management treatments, prohibiting stricter controls on non-opioids compared to opioids.

HB 1034 would not put prescription opioids out-of-reach for those patients who want – or require – those treatments. Rather, the legislation would ensure that Washingtonians would have full access to the full suite of safe, effective, and FDA-approved pain management approaches, including both opioid and non-opioid options. In doing so, HB 1034 can prevent opioid addiction in Washington before it begins and save lives.

The legislation being considered by this committee mirrors a federal bill, the Alternatives to Prevent Addiction in the Nation (Alternatives to PAIN) Act, which was introduced last year in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and will soon be reintroduced in the 119th Congress. **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 Washington, 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.

It is our hope that this committee and the full delegation can get behind this commonsense approach to addressing the state's opioid addiction crisis. Voices applauds the advancements proposed in HB 1034 and would like to see these efforts come to fruition.

Once again, thank you for making the time today to recognize and examine the importance of expanding access to non-addictive opioid alternatives throughout Washington. We urge the committee to take action to prevent opioid addiction before it starts and pass HB 1034.

Voices stands ready to work with your committee and the full delegation to prevent opioid addiction and enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices

ⁱ 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

ⁱⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱⁱ 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>

^{iv} 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>