



*February 14, 2025*

Testimony Of  
**Voices for Non-Opioid Choices**  
Before The  
**Missouri Senate Insurance and Banking Committee**  
**On Senate Bill 158**

Dear Chair Sandy Crawford and Members of the Missouri Senate Insurance and Banking Committee,

I am Chris Fox, Executive Director of Voices for Non-Opioid Choices. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony to the committee.

Thank you for holding this hearing on critical legislation that will benefit individuals across Missouri. I am writing in strong support of **Missouri Senate Bill 158** and urge its swift passage to help prevent opioid addiction in the state.

Voices for Non-Opioid Choices (“Voices”) applauds Senator Mike Henderson for introducing this important legislation and fully supports its passage.

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, SB 158 will prevent opioid addiction for many Missourians 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 220 Americans every day to an opioid-related drug overdose.**

Missouri is not immune from this national epidemic. In 2023, there were **1,465 opioid-related overdose deaths**, accounting for **77.1% 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 Missouri, there were **47 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.**

SB 158 would prohibit health benefit plans from prioritizing opioid drugs over non-opioid alternatives for enrollees with an elevated risk of opioid misuse, requiring coverage of non-opioid drugs without mandating the prior use of opioids or imposing higher cost-sharing.

SB 158 would not put prescription opioids out-of-reach for those patients who want – or require – those treatments. Rather, the legislation would ensure that more Missourians 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> U.S. 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 Missouri, 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 SB 158 and would like to see these efforts come to fruition. This legislation would enable more patients to have access to non-addictive products and would improve care for the tens of thousands of Missourians 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 Missouri. I urge the committee to take action to prevent opioid addiction before it starts and pass SB 158.

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).

Sincerely,

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>