



Physicians Caring for Texans

House County Affairs Committee
Written Testimony of the Texas Medical Association
House Bill 1403 by Rep. Joe Moody
March 15, 2023

Honorable Chair Neave Criado, Vice-Chair Stucky, and Committee Members:

The Texas Medical Association, representing more than 57,000 physicians and medical students across the state, appreciates the opportunity to testify **in support of** House Bill 1403, relating to the establishment of disease control pilot programs called syringe services programs, to reduce the risk of spread of certain infectious and communicable diseases.

We applaud the House for last session's efforts to pass this bill, originally filed in 2015 by the late Rep. Ruth Jones McClendon as House Bill 65. Since then, syringe services programs have continued to expand in the U.S., due to Republican-led and Democrat-led state houses embracing similar bills. Such syringe programs now exist in 43 states. There also has been bipartisan support at the executive level with both the Biden and Trump administrations acknowledging the importance of the programs to reduce disease spread and combat illicit drug use.

TMA supports syringe services programs as an evidence-based harm-reduction strategy among persons who inject drugs and as an important component of the fight against the opioid epidemic. Syringe services programs are a public health intervention that reduce the transmission of blood-borne viruses, including HIV and hepatitis C. They also assist persons who inject drugs obtain treatment and cease using recreational intravenous drugs. The public health benefit of preventing the transmission of infections such as HIV and hepatitis C results in substantial cost savings, as the associated medical treatment for one case of these diseases can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Syringe services programs also serve as a primary distribution point for fentanyl test strips and naloxone, two critically important tools that are necessary, as Gov. Greg Abbott stated, "to make sure we do everything that we can to protect people from dying from fentanyl".¹ Without syringe services programs, access to these life-saving resources is significantly deterred. In San Antonio, where the only legally permitted program in Texas operates, operators distributed 7,300 doses of naloxone (Narcan) last year and reversed 1,530 overdoses.²

Allowing certain Texas counties – or hospital districts within those counties – to use syringe exchange programs, along with recovery counseling and referral to substance use disorder treatment, is a tangible and meaningful way to help combat both substance use disorder and the attendant public health costs of bloodborne diseases transmitted through illegal drug use.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments. For further questions, please contact Matt Dowling, TMA director of public affairs, at matt.dowling@texmed.org.

¹ Governor Greg Abbott. *University of Houston*, December 1, 2022. Sourced from: <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/12/01/greg-abbott-fentanyl-strips-opioid-overdose/>

² Dimmick, I. (2023, January 20). Bexar County to distribute more anti-overdose drugs to deputies. San Antonio Report. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://sanantonioreport.org/bexar-county-deputies-narcan-overdose-drugs/>.