March 22, 2023

Good morning Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy-Vahey, and members of the Public Health Committee. I am here to express my strong support for SB 9: AN ACT CONCERNING HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOR CONNECTICUT RESIDENTS. This bill aims to equalize and increase access to health care, including reproductive health care in the state and to strengthen the state's response to the fentanyl and opioid epidemic, while also looking to address healthcare workforce issues.

When the Supreme Court overruled Roe v. Wade, Connecticut made it clear that we would protect the right to reproductive freedom. This right includes protecting assisted reproductive technology like IVF as well as same-day access to long-acting reversible contraceptives. SB 9 works to protect access to these services, as well as to protect anyone who seeks services at facilities that provide reproductive health. Any interference, intimidation, or physical obstruction of a person entering one of these facilities can lead to a civil action and relief for the person. This allows our residents to feel safe while accessing their basic rights.

According to data from the Connecticut Department of Health, drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in Connecticut. The legislation before you creates a pilot program for three harm reduction centers in municipalities in the state. A harm reduction center is a medical facility where a person may safely consume controlled substances under the
observation of licensed health care providers who are present to provide necessary medical treatment in the event of an overdose of a controlled substance. They also provide referrals to substance use disorder or other mental health services to individuals using the centers. The bill creates an advisory committee to monitor the centers and come up with long term, well-rounded solutions to the opioid crisis.

Connecticut has the chance to be a leader in implementing this groundbreaking pilot program, along with Rhode Island and New York City who have centers like these. OnPoint NYC, started in November of 2021, to date has had 65,945 utilizations of its overdose preventor centers, 819 overdose interventions, and ZERO deaths. This is the right step forward in helping the most vulnerable of our state and making sure there are steps to recovery and support for them in the state.

Connecticut now sees over 1,000 overdose deaths per year. This legislation establishes an opioid antagonist bulk purchase fund for eligible entities, which will allow much more free access to Narcan and will save lives. The bill also creates an opioid antagonist leave-behind program, allowing EMS services to leave behind Narcan for people they believe will need it. This program will also create training for EMS services on how to teach others to use Narcan when they leave it behind. All of these as well as measures to co-prescribe opioid antagonists with opioid prescriptions, creates a strong foundation to fight this epidemic we are facing.

This is important legislation to pass for our healthcare workers. During the COVID pandemic, we have seen the strain on our healthcare workforce. To develop this workforce, SB 9 establishes a Health Care Career Advisory Council, which will study how to best promote health care professions as career options to students in middle and high school. SB 9 also creates a working group to develop recommendations for expanding the nursing workforce in the state.
We will continue to see shortages in these fields unless we find a way to enhance the quality and working conditions of these jobs, including expansion of access to these careers by offering evaluations in different languages. With SB 9, nurse's aides evaluations will be offered in both English and Spanish, creating a new opportunity for a large population of state residents.

Senate Bill 9 will also create a career pathways program for personal care attendants to increase employment retention and recruitment of personal care attendants, which will create a stable workforce for the consumer. There will be a task force to study medical malpractice reform to incentivize physicians and other licensed health care providers to practice in the state and the legislation will create reciprocity for advanced practice registered nurses. SB 9 also establishes a Physical Therapy Licensure Compact to facilitate interstate practice of physical therapy. All of these parts of SB 9 encourage more healthcare workers to come and work in our state. We must show them that we are welcoming them and creating a work environment they want to be a part of.

Another important part of the legislation expands the health care provider loan reimbursement program to provide at least ten percent of grants to health-care providers employed full-time in rural communities in the state. This will help to motivate health care workers to serve in our under served and rural communities, creating equity in access to healthcare for all residents of our state. Overall, this is a comprehensive bill, with many different functions, but most importantly it will take a step in the direction of a safer and healthier Connecticut.

I urge you to support SB 9, An Act Concerning Health and Wellness for Connecticut Residents to help address the ongoing opioid and fentanyl crisis, improve access to healthcare for all and bolster the healthcare workforce. Thank you for your time and consideration.