

March 4, 2020

Dear Speaker of the House Nicholas Mattiello and Senate President Dominick Ruggerio:

I am writing this open letter to you to recommend repeal of the Opioid Stewardship Act, passed and enacted last year, which levies a tax on medicines that lawmakers considered to be involved in the opioid crisis. However, as with all attempts to increase the tax burden on our state's healthcare system, costs are being passed down to patients.

This adverse impact of this tax was predicted in an [opinion piece](#) last spring in the Providence Journal by our Center's Chairman of the Board, **Dr. Stephen Skoly**, a maxillo-facial surgeon in Cranston.

While those who produce opioids are not being directly taxed, every other part of the supply chain appears to have borne the brunt. Distributors, pharmacies, hospitals, and urgent care clinics – all part of the vital care system which gets medications into patients' hands – have been unduly burdened by the bill.

This is not to mention the patients who rely on opioid-based pain relief in their daily lives. Any tax on a legal medication raises ethical red flags, but increasing the costs of medicine for those who suffer from severe pain is completely reprehensible.

I am encouraged that both of you have indicated some openness to revisiting the bill. And hopefully you will do so during this year's General Assembly session, even considering a full repeal of the opioid tax as part of the 2021 budget.

Combatting the opioid crisis requires a comprehensive approach, which brings together patients, providers, law enforcement, and healthcare suppliers to work collaboratively - not another government-imposed tax. As we've seen in our state and in others, more taxes increase costs for patients, harming middle class families and taxpayers.

As Chairman Skoly wrote, *"when developing policy, Rhode Island legislators need to acknowledge the importance of protecting the affordability and accessibility of necessary medications for our state's patients and their families."* It is time to correct last year's mistake.

As the legislature looks to repeal or revise the 2019 Opioid Stewardship Act in this, the 2020, session, I encourage you to break with the dangerous precedent of taxing legal medications and work to engage our community-members. We can find a way to combat addiction which does not reach into the pockets of hardworking Rhode Islanders and patients.

We look forward to working together to end our state's opioid crisis with common sense and compassion, which begins by repealing the Opioid Stewardship Act.

Sincerely,



Mike Stenhouse, CEO, 401-429-6115

Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity