

May 20, 2022

TO: Chairwoman Baker, Chairman Santarsiero, Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

FROM: Heather Tyler, Vice President, State Legislative Advocacy

SUBJECT: Support for Senate Bill 926, Syringe Services Program

On behalf of 235 member hospitals statewide, The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) expresses its support for Senate Bill 926 sponsored by Senator Pat Browne. The bill will allow Pennsylvania to offer syringe service programs (SSPs) and to join with 46 other states that have determined possession and distribution of clean syringes to be legal without a prescription.

This legislation will provide important benefits for both patients and hospitals. It has been referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee and we urge your consideration and approval.

Pennsylvania has the third highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 30 years of research shows that comprehensive syringe services programs are effective and cost-saving, do not increase illegal drug use or crime, and play an important role in reducing the transmission of viral hepatitis, HIV, and other infections. Research also shows that new users of syringe services programs are five times more likely to enter drug treatment and nearly three times more likely to stop using drugs than those who don't use the programs.

Pennsylvania has the ninth highest rate of new HIV infections in the United States. By allowing Pennsylvania to establish and operate SSPs, we can minimize a critical path for the spread of infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C, HIV, and other blood-borne infections, thus alleviating some stress on the health care system and reducing hospital readmissions. Compared with the costs of treating HIV infections, for example, investments in SSPs are minor.

In a recent survey conducted by HAP, Pennsylvania hospitals identified emergency departments as their greatest challenge in retaining and recruiting staff during this profound workforce crisis. There is also promising evidence to suggest that SSPs help reduce overdose-related hospital admissions.

Finally, SSPs can play an incremental role in increasing safety for Pennsylvania's medical professionals. By providing safe needle disposal and reducing the number of infected needles in our communities, first responders will be better protected from needle-stick injuries when responding to a patient.

This is good policy with a history of good outcomes.

On behalf of Pennsylvania hospitals, we respectfully ask that you please consider Senate Bill 926 in committee and vote yes.