



October 10, 2019

West Side Heroin/Opioid Task Force United

We have to do everything that we can to save lives during the epidemic of deaths from overdoses. That's why I have introduced two House Bills, HB3840 and HB3879, to help to prevent fatal overdoses in Illinois. There are now more deaths due to heroin/opioid overdoses in the United States and Illinois than deaths due to car accidents or even due to gun violence. For one recent 12-month period, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that 69,894 Americans died of drug overdoses. Nearly 70% of those overdose deaths were due to opioids such as heroin or even stronger substances such as fentanyl. In 2017, more than 2000 people died of opioid overdoses in Illinois, and 796 people died of opioid overdose in Chicago. That is more than 2 deaths a day in Chicago due to opioid overdoses. There are more than 10,000 Illinois emergency department visits per year for opioid overdoses.

I personally know people, including people I went to school with, who have died of overdoses at home. This epidemic is hitting Illinois, Chicago, and especially the West Side, very hard. When people experience an overdose, it is a wake-up call that we need to respond to. We need more naloxone, the antidote that reverses an overdose, in the hands of family and community members, so they can more quickly respond to an overdose when it happens at home or on our streets. Good Samaritan laws provide legal protections when someone tries to help another person who has overdosed. I introduced House Bill 3879, which provides that a person who, in good faith, seeks or obtains emergency medical assistance for someone experiencing an overdose shall not be deemed to violate his or her conditions of aftercare release (for a juvenile) or conditions of parole or mandatory supervised release.

According to the Drug Policy Alliance, an important solution to encourage overdose witnesses to seek medical help is to exempt them from arrest and criminal prosecution through the adoption of 911 Good Samaritan immunity laws. Current Good Samaritan law in Illinois does not expressly protect those who are on parole or mandatory supervised release. HB 3879 aims to address this loophole, so anyone can feel that they can call 911 and help someone without fear. Now, if 911 was called and your loved one was taken to the hospital after an overdose, most often he or she was stabilized and then released. What people often don't realize that a person can be on the brink of death, taken to the ER and then released without a discharge plan for treatment or continuing care. This must change – after an overdose, people should be offered a warm handoff for ongoing care for their opioid use disorder. But if that is not possible for everyone now, the least we can do is make sure that they have the overdose reversal medication naloxone when they are discharged from the hospital, and that their family and friends know how to use it. I introduced HB 3840 to make sure this happens. Let's also get this legislation passed and save more lives.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District