

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



SENATOR JOHNNY ELLIS

SPONSOR STATEMENT - SENATE BILL 23

SB 23 - An act relating to immunity for prescribing, providing, or administering overdose drugs.

Heroin and opioid pain reliever (OPR) use and abuse constitute a dangerous and growing public health threat throughout Alaska, yet one of the medical tools to reverse opioid overdoses is currently unavailable when needed most. Senate Bill 23 removes civil liabilities from doctors who prescribe, and trained bystanders who administer naloxone, or Narcan, an opiate antidote which reverses opiate drug overdoses thereby saving the life of the victim.

Although naloxone is a prescription drug, it is not a controlled substance and has no abuse potential. It is most commonly injected intravenously for fastest action, or in a nasal spray, which usually causes the drug to act within a minute, and last up to 45 minutes. A 2002–2004 study referenced by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that 50 naloxone programs nationwide had reversed more than 10,000 overdoses.

Recently, the American Medical Association endorsed the training of lay people in the use of naloxone to prevent overdoses, and the U.S. Drug Czar remarked that naloxone distribution is a key component of overdose prevention. 26 other states and the District of Columbia have passed naloxone access laws as a result of growing opioid use and overdose rates. That's up from 18 in 2013 and just eight in 2012.

OPR and heroin overdoses constitute a growing public health threat nationally, and have reached a crisis level in Alaska. According to the Alaska State Troopers' 2014 Annual Drug Report, there has been a resurgence of heroin and other opiate use and abuse in the last few years, identifying an increase in heroin abuse and the continued abuse of other opiates as significant concerns in both urban and rural Alaska. Lieutenant Rex Leath, deputy commander of the troopers' Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit commented upon reviewing the report that, "the whole state has been really adamant that they feel like heroin is taking over their neighborhoods. Heroin, it literally is killing our kids."

The Anchorage Police Department (APD) reported a 94% increase in heroin seizures in 2013, and heroin-related overdoses are now claiming more young lives than traffic fatalities.

Last year, the Legislature wisely passed [HB 369](#) referred to as the “Make the Call” Good Samaritan bill, offering a restriction from prosecution to those who alert the authorities when someone they’re with experiences an overdose. SB 23 further addresses Alaska’s opioid abuse epidemic by removing some legal barriers to the timely administration of naloxone.

While rehabilitation and drug enforcement are still critical to stemming the tide of this epidemic, SB 23 gives Alaskans who need it a vital tool that could save Alaskan lives. I strongly urge you to join in support of Senate Bill 23.