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## **Overdose Bill Moves Forward: Unanimous Judiciary Committee Support**

SACRAMENTO – California Senate Bill (SB) 767, the Overdose Treatment Liability Act, co-sponsored by the Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC), a national health and human rights advocacy group working to reduce drug-related harm, and the County of Los Angeles passed the bipartisan California Senate Judiciary Committee today in a 5-to-0 vote. SB 767 will make it easier for health care professionals to participate in comprehensive drug overdose prevention programs that prescribe the opioid antagonist naloxone, thereby removing a large obstacle to the creation and expansion of such programs in California. This proposed legislation will also make it easier to get opioid antagonists into the hands of the people who are the most likely to be bystanders to opioid overdoses, increasing the likelihood that people overdosing on opioids will receive naloxone promptly.

Emalie Huriaux, HRC's Overdose Project Manager stated after the unanimous vote, "We are pleasantly surprised. Liability legislation rarely gets support from the Senate Judiciary Committee. This vote shows that committee members understand the lifesaving effects SB 767 will have."

Sandi McClure, a member of the Los Angeles Overdose Taskforce, delivered powerful testimony about the loss of her daughter, Jennifer, 15 months ago to a heroin overdose, and how access to naloxone may have saved her life. In addition, Dr. Jeffrey Gunzenhauser, Medical Director for the County of Los Angeles, spoke about the drug overdose epidemic in Los Angeles and throughout the country.

Although naloxone is a very safe drug and recent studies have proven that lay people, with appropriate training, can safely and properly administer it, some clinicians are concerned about prescribing take-home naloxone for use by lay people. Clinicians voice concerns that patients may use naloxone on a third party experiencing an overdose and, in the event of an adverse reaction, the clinician could be held liable. In recent years, New York, New Mexico, and Connecticut have enacted legislation similar to SB 767 to protect licensed health care professionals from civil and criminal liability when prescribing take-home opioid antagonists.

Since November 2003, HRC's Overdose Project has collaborated with the San Francisco Department of Public Health to provide overdose prevention, recognition, and response training, including naloxone prescriptions, to people at risk for experiencing an opioid overdose. To date, this collaboration has provided training and prescriptions to nearly 1,000 people and heard reports from 250 of them that they used naloxone in an overdose situation.

Drug overdose, which is entirely preventable, is the second leading cause of accidental death in the United States. When a person overdoses on opioids (heroin, morphine, methadone, oxycontin, etc.), he/she is rendered unconscious and is in danger of dying because the opioids slow down, and eventually stop, the person's breathing. Naloxone counteracts life-threatening depression of the central nervous and respiratory systems caused by an opioid overdose, allowing an overdose victim to breathe normally. Currently, naloxone can be prescribed only by licensed health care professionals, and has the same level of regulation as prescription ibuprofen. SB 767 protects providers who prescribe take-home naloxone, facilitating greater access to lifesaving medicine for people experiencing opioid overdoses.

The bill will be heard later this month by the Senate Appropriations Committee and, if passed, will move on for a vote by the entire Senate later this year.

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For more information about the Harm Reduction Coalition, visit <http://www.harmreduction.org/>.