

Dayton to sign bill aimed at heroin overdoses

By MIKE CRONIN - Associated Press Wednesday, May 7, 2014

Minnesota lawmakers on Wednesday unanimously passed a bill aimed at making sure people aren't afraid to seek help during a drug overdose, with victims' family members and loved ones predicting the legislation will save lives.

The bill would protect 911 callers from drug prosecution even if they're the people having the overdose emergency. It also authorizes more people to carry and administer a potentially life-saving drug. The bill is commonly known as "Steve's Law" for Steve Rummler, a former Minnesotan who became addicted to opiates after hurting his back and overdosed on heroin in 2011.

"This shows our state is ready and willing to move forward to save lives, to show addiction is a disease and not a moral failing," said Lexi Reed Holtum, 45, of Eden Prairie, Rummler's fiancée at the time of his death.

"More lives will be saved," said Isabella Gerry, 11, Reed Holtum's daughter.

The House and Senate both passed the measure unanimously on Wednesday. Gov. Mark Dayton will sign the bill into law, press secretary Matt Swenson said.

Heroin has hit Minnesota hard, as it has in many other parts of the country. In 2013, 98 people died in the state due to heroin-related incidents, according to preliminary figures from the state Health Department. And the number of people entering heroin treatment programs has increased tenfold over the last 20 years, according to other state data.

"This vote is about keeping children alive," said Rep. Dan Schoen, DFL-St. Paul Park, the bill's author. "It's about getting people the help they deserve so they can be here one more day."

"Now, people will know they're not going to get in trouble and they'll call 911 instead of letting someone die," said Michon Jenkin, 56, of Savage. Her daughter, 29-year-old Ashley Jenkin-Segal, overdosed on oxycodone and Xanax and died in June. The person with Jenkin-Segal that day was on parole and afraid to call 911 because of the potential criminal consequences, Jenkin said.

Authorities say heroin is cheap in Minnesota, easy to get and among the purest in the country.

According to data from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the number of people admitted to drug treatment where heroin was the primary drug used was 450 in 1993, compared with 4,519 for just part of 2013, the most current figures available.

Victims' family members also praised the provision that would allow non-health care professionals to carry and administer drugs such as naloxone, which may prevent or reverse an opiate overdose.

"We want to get the word out so people will take the 10-minute (naloxone) training," said Star Selleck, 57, of Edina. Her son, Ian David Selleck, died of a heroin overdose in 2009 at age 19. Selleck said if the police officer who responded had something like naloxone with him, her son might be alive.

"We want to see it become as widespread as defibrillators," Selleck said.

www.SteveRummlerHopeFoundation.org



From left, Michon Jenkin, Lexi Reed Holtum, Isabella Gerry and Star Selleck, who all lost loved ones to drug overdoses, pose for a photo Wednesday, May 7, 2014, at the state Capitol in St. Paul, Minn., after the Minnesota House unanimously passed a bill aimed at making sure people aren't afraid to seek help in case of a drug overdose. (AP Photo/Mike Cronin)