Bill to Prevent Opioid Deaths Vetoed by Governor Newsom

(SACRAMENTO, Calif.) – Governor Gavin Newsom has vetoed Senate Bill 641 by Senator Richard Roth (D-Riverside), which would have helped ensure that those who administer overdose reversal medications have the best chance at saving lives. The legislation, co-sponsored by the California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives (CAADPE), the Alexander Neville Foundation, and Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco would have addressed the "fourth wave" of the opioid epidemic, driven by the combination of the synthetic opioid fentanyl and stimulants like methamphetamines and cocaine.

"A person experiencing a chaotic drug event deserves harm reduction and robust treatment options, not a death sentence," said Robb Layne, Executive Director of CAADPE. "Under SB 641, California would have been better equipped to save lives."

Supported by addiction treatment professionals, law enforcement, behavioral health advocates, educators, and families impacted by overdose, SB 641 would have expanded the scope of California's Naloxone Distribution Project (NDP) to encompass all FDA-approved drugs engineered to combat synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Fentanyl now accounts for the vast majority of California's overdose deaths. The proliferation of fentanyl, which is up to 50 times stronger than heroin, has made it increasingly difficult to reverse overdoses with a single Narcan® device, so stronger formulations and newer treatments must be made available. Between 2019 and 2021, overdose deaths increased by 121%.

"While I believe that our legislation was an essential component in our State's response to the fentanyl crisis, and we need to use every tool in the toolbox, I certainly understand budgetary constraints. I look forward to working to see how we might be able to address the Governor's concerns, while still accomplishing our goals, during next year's legislative session," said Senator Roth.

Created in 2018, the NDP provides eligible applicants with the overdose reversal drug naloxone at no cost. But as more deadly and complex types of synthetic opioids like fentanyl are increasingly mixed with recreational drugs like cannabis, cocaine, and other stimulants, a larger population is unknowingly placed at risk of opioid overdose.

"I am deeply disappointed with Governor Newsom's decision to veto SB 641. More than 500 people die every year in Riverside County due to overdoses and the data continues to trend upwards. Unfortunately, the state's current NDP distribution of Narcan® is outdated and was designed for opioids, like heroin, that proliferated our streets in the 1990s and early 2000s," Sheriff Bianco said. "We are now experiencing people overdosing and dying at an alarming rate from synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Although I agree that money must be spent on prevention efforts, that does not diminish the immediate need for these upgraded life-saving medications to be distributed to first responders NOW! Our fight is not over, and I pledge to continue lobbying our legislature and Governor to do more to end this devastating overdose crisis."

About CAADPE
Established in 1989, CAADPE member agencies provide substance use disorder treatment services at over 300 sites in California. CAADPE is the only statewide Association representing all types of substance use disorder treatment programs in California. http://www.caadpe.org

About Riverside County Sheriff's Office
Riverside County, created in 1893 from portions of San Bernardino and San Diego counties, is the fourth largest in the state of California covering over 7,300 square miles. The law enforcement professionals of the Riverside County Sheriff's Office, with a staff of over 4,000 dedicated men and women, cover this expanse of southern California and are dedicated to serving the citizens of its communities with integrity, professionalism, leadership and loyalty.

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