



April 4, 2016

Senator Mike McGuire
State Capitol
Room 5064
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 1174 — Foster youth overprescribing - SUPPORT

Dear Senator McGuire,

Consumer Watchdog is pleased to support SB 1174, which would enable much-needed oversight of psychotropic prescribing to children in the foster care system.

The *San Jose Mercury News* series, "Drugging Our Kids," has detailed the troubling scope and devastating impact of overprescribing of psychotropic and other drugs on our most vulnerable youth.

Nearly 1 in 4 California foster teens are prescribed psychotropic drugs; of those nearly 60 percent were prescribed an anti-psychotic – the powerful drug class most likely to engender debilitating side effects and with few FDA-approved indications for children and adolescents. According to the Quality Improvement Project, during fiscal year 2012-13 there were 104,688 pharmacy claim records for 12,025 children who received a paid claim for psychotropic medication. That's nearly nine prescriptions per foster child in a single year.

SB 1174 will help identify physicians who engage in this avoidable over-medication of foster youth.

Last year, the Department of Health Care Services and the Medical Board of California adopted a one-year trial Data Use Agreement that allows for the sharing of prescriber data in order to identify outlying prescribers. Such data sharing practices should not be on a one-time basis, but rather an ongoing process for improving the quality of prescribing for foster youth.

SB 1174 enables the Medical Board to confidentially collect and analyze data, and, when warranted, conduct investigations of physicians who frequently prescribe over the recognized safety parameters for children.

In 2014, drug overdoses claimed 4,500 lives in California. Most of those overdoses involved prescription opioids or heroin. In recent years the Medical Board has stepped up its scrutiny of prescribing patterns, partly in response to this opioid abuse epidemic. Existing tools allowed the Medical Board to conduct these investigations. SB 1174 is necessary to give the Medical Board the data it needs to conduct similar investigations into dangerous prescribing to foster youth.

It is important to note that the Medical Board is already required to investigate physicians who may be placing patient safety at risk, and bring enforcement actions to hold physicians accountable when they do. SB 1774 does not change this; it simply helps the Board identify problems in this significant area of patient harm.

Over the last year, the legislature has taken important steps to protect the health and safety of foster youth. SB 1174 provides the Medical Board with the information it needs to ensure that physicians' prescribing patterns are shifting in response to those reforms.

SB 1174 is a key element in the legislature's efforts to curb overprescribing to children and Consumer Watchdog is in strong support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmen Balber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Carmen Balber
Executive Director