Human Rights Watch Urges Florida to Expand Syringe Exchanges [VIDEO]

The advocacy group is officially in support of the IDEA bill, a proposal aimed at reducing overdose deaths, HIV and hepatitis C.

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International advocacy group Human Rights Watch (HRW) has set its sights on Florida's opioid epidemic and is urging the state's governor to pass a new bill proposing to expand syringe exchange services across the state, according to a recent press release from the organization.

The recent dispatch announces the group's full support of SB800/H579, the Infectious Disease Elimination Pilot Programs Act (IDEA) — a bill that would permit all Florida counties to establish syringe exchange test facilities for people who use drugs in their communities. The news comes after the release of dire statistics from the state's health department regarding the ongoing opioid epidemic. In 2016, more than 6,000 Floridians died of an opioid overdose, a 35 percent increase from the year before. And while Governor Rick Scott has declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency in the state, opioid-related deaths are continuing to rise.

The HRW report argues that syringe exchanges have a proven track record of reducing HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections, preventing drug overdoses and linking injection drug users to treatment programs. The paper also notes that it's been proved that harm reduction facilities do not raise rates of drug use or crime in the communities that adopt them.

Currently, Florida has only one syringe exchange—a program in Miami that has enrolled more than 600 clients, removed nearly 100,000 dirty needles from the city's streets and conducted hundreds of HIV and hepatitis C screenings.

To learn more about the group's support and the IDEA bill, watch the video below.

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