

Governor Baker signs opioid bill



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Governor Charlie Baker embraced Chris Herren, a former Celtics player and recovering addict.

By **Joshua Miller** | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 14, 2016

In an emotional ceremony, Governor Charlie Baker on Monday signed into law a measure that places tighter state control on opioids, in an effort to stanch the supply of the addictive drugs.

Baker trumpeted the bipartisan legislation as “the most comprehensive

the heartbreaking losses families have endured.

Voice wavering, he offered a simple supplication: “May today’s bill passage signal to you that the Commonwealth is listening and we will keep fighting for all of you.”

The law, which comes as Massachusetts grapples with a deadly drug crisis that claims about 100 lives per month, will immediately limit initial opioid prescriptions to a seven-day supply.

Starting in July, the state will mandate that hospitals administer a substance-abuse evaluation to anyone who shows up in an emergency room believed to be suffering from an opioid overdose. And the new law will eventually require schools to conduct verbal screenings of students for substance abuse.

It also requires, starting in October, practitioners check a prescription monitoring program before prescribing drugs that have relatively high potential for abuse. That’s an effort to stop doctor-shopping — addicts going from physician to physician looking for opioid drugs, such as OxyContin, Percocet, and Vicodin.

And the law allows patients to voluntarily reduce the amount of opioids they receive from a pharmacist, getting, say, 10 pills even if their doctor’s prescription is for 15.

While the law is notably weaker than the bill Baker originally proposed — he wanted a three-day initial prescription limit rather than seven, for example — the governor said Monday he signed it happily.

Baker had originally proposed allowing hospitals to hold addicts who pose a danger to themselves or others against their will for three days, evaluate them, and decide whether to seek legal permission for longer commitments.

The idea was to divert people who might leave the hospital and immediately start using drugs again and allow them to break the cycle of addiction.

But the Legislature balked at the provision, instead putting forward the more modest emergency room substance-abuse evaluation requirement that is now law.

The new law's provisions includes several exemptions. For examples, initial opioid prescriptions for chronic pain, cancer pain, and for palliative care can be for more than a seven-day supply. And students, parents, and schools can opt out of the mandatory verbal substance abuse screening.

Baker said the law is just one of many steps to combat the pills and heroin crisis that has hit families across the state, and he fully expects future legislative acts to also address the scourge.

At the ceremony, several top officials hailed the new act. They included the Legislature's top two leaders, Senate President Stanley C. Rosenberg and House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo; the state's top law enforcement official, Attorney General Maura Healey; and Mayor Martin J. Walsh of Boston, a longtime advocate for those struggling with addiction.

Rosenberg heralded the act as enshrining the right way of looking at addiction into law. "I'm proud that here in Massachusetts, we have turned a very big corner. This problem used to be seen as a crime. It's now understood to be a



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Janis McGrory got a hug from her daughter, Amy LeFort. McGrory's daughter, Liz, died of an overdose.

disease.”

DeLeo said the new law is one of many steps to address the problem: “Our battle, our fight against substance abuse continues and it’s going to continue for some time. This isn’t the end.”

And Healey, who grew emotional, had a message for families.

“To those who have lost loved ones, to those who have loved ones who are hurting, who are struggling, who are in pain, I recognize, we all recognize, that this legislation will not bring your loved ones back,” she said, voice wavering.

But, Healey said, she hopes that they will find some measure of comfort that there is a law that is going to change the course of other families and other individuals in this state.

From a political perspective, the praise Democratic officials lavished on Baker, a Republican likely to run for reelection in 2018, was notable.

Walsh gave “a special thank you” to the governor and framed him as a bold leader who took a tough stand for an important issue.

“When the governor said ‘I’m putting together these very aggressive pieces in my bill,’ I said, ‘I love them all.’ . . . He said, ‘I’m going to [be] bold here, and I’m going to take some chances.’ He said, ‘Will you stand with me?’ I said, ‘Absolutely, governor.’ And then he turned to the attorney general, and he said, ‘Will you stand with me?’ and she said, ‘Absolutely, governor,’ ” Walsh said.

“

*‘May today’s bill passage
signal to you that the
Commonwealth is listening
and we will keep fighting
for all of you.’*

Governor Charlie Baker, after signing bill
on opioids

But beyond the political ramifications, Walsh emphasized a simple point. If this law helps one family and one addict, the mayor said, it has done its job.

Andy Rosen and David Scharfenberg of the Globe staff contributed to this report. Joshua Miller can be reached at joshua.miller@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@jm_bos](#). [Click here to subscribe](#) to his weekday e-mail update on politics.

Get Today's Headlines from the Globe in your inbox:

SIGN UP

[Privacy Policy](#)

SHOW 47 COMMENTS

Recommended for you



Murder trial for Aaron Hernandez ally Ernest Wallace starts

Wallace allegedly helped the former Patriot shoot Odin Lloyd to death in 2013. [MORE...](#)



Catholic Memorial students banned from attending semifinal game

The school banned its students from attending the championship basketball game Monday, a move that drew approval and criticism. [MORE...](#)

Taunton man kills armed intruder, disarms another

The 24-year-old man managed to break free of a headlock, grab the gun from one of the intruders, and fatally shoot the other, authorities said. [MORE...](#)

Bankrupt Duxbury dad battles to get student loan debt forgiven



A common hardship standard applied by bankruptcy courts makes it difficult to have student-loan debt wiped away. [MORE...](#)



Donor's death shatters family, stuns surgeons

Generosity drove Paul Hawks to donate part of his liver to his brother-in-law. Then disaster struck, and transplant medicine has had to rethink its rules. [MORE...](#)



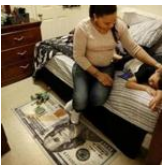
Outgoing state senator ponders running against Baker

Dan Wolf, a commercial pilot and Cape Air's chief executive, is seen as a likely challenger in the 2018 race. [MORE...](#)



Powerful judge's son charged in Ill. hate crime

Matthew Kafker spray-painted racist, homophobic graffiti and Donald Trump's name in a chapel, authorities said. [MORE...](#)



Boston's struggle with income segregation

Affluence is surging in some areas of Boston, while poverty remains deep in others, creating a city of neighborhoods that are separated by more than distance. [MORE...](#)



Man polls Lexington Town Meeting on proposed weapons ban

Robert Rotberg is deciding his next step in the effort to prohibit certain types of semi-automatic weapons in town. [MORE...](#)

Charlton police warn residents of men challenging others to rap battles

Police said a group of men pulled up to three teenage boys on Saturday and asked if they wanted to “spit some bars” with them. [MORE...](#)



Hospitals working to make intensive care less terrifying

Recent research found that nearly one-quarter of ICU patients suffer from PTSD — a rate similar to combat soldiers and rape victims. [MORE...](#)



Harvard Law School to ditch controversial shield

Law school officials said the Harvard Corporation has accepted its request to change the school’s symbol, which has ties to a slaveholding family.

[MORE...](#)



Boston rescuers free man trapped under tanker truck

The worker was changing a tire on a truck used to vacuum out and clean sewer drains. [MORE...](#)

Catholic Memorial students chant anti-Jewish taunt at game

About 50 to 75 fans shouted “You killed Jesus!” at Newton North High School fans during a state tournament basketball game. [MORE...](#)



SPOTLIGHT UPDATE

Overlapping surgeries to face US Senate inquiry

The Senate Finance Committee’s chairman asked 20 hospital systems to provide records about surgeons who operate on two patients at once. [MORE...](#)



Belmont bakery damaged in explosion

An oven exploded, causing damage to that building and possibly some nearby structures, police said. [MORE...](#)



An extra 10 minutes leads to voided SAT results for 15 students

Test results for 15 Greater Boston students have been voided after a proctor accidentally gave them more time to finish a section of the exam. [MORE...](#)



KEVIN CULLEN

Marathon bombings hero will look away this time

Brian Pomodoro isn't interested in seeing "Patriots Day." Why? "I already saw it, live." [MORE..](#)



Parents of Justina Pelletier sue Boston Children's Hospital

The teen spoke out at a press conference to announce a lawsuit against Boston Children's Hospital over her care. [MORE..](#)
