

March 12, 2024

The Hon. John Hoffman
Chair, House Human Services
2111 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Testimony in support of Senate File 3459

Dear Chair Hoffman and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the FFRF Action Fund (FFRF AF) to provide testimony in strong support of Senate File 3459. FFRF AF is an affiliate of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including over 860 members in Minnesota and two local chapters in the state. We work to ensure that our laws remain secular in order to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to represent the views of nonreligious citizens.

Minnesota should take great pride in knowing that its treatment programs for individuals with substance use disorders are top-notch. Despite this, many individuals who receive treatment through the criminal legal system are often required by the state to participate in substance use treatment programs with religious undertones that conflict with their beliefs and can hinder successful treatment.

S.F. 3459, known as the Minnesota Recovery Options Act, seeks to provide Minnesotans with substance use disorders with effective, evidence-based substance use disorder treatment that is vital to recovery. This bill would help ensure that these Minnesotans can receive the appropriate treatment they need for substance use disorders. No one should ever be forced to choose between incarceration and government-mandated religious programming they don't believe in.

Defendants who feel they are being forced to participate in substance use disorder recovery programs based on the twelve steps are often unaware that secular treatment programs are available. The proposed Minnesota Secular Recovery Options Act would ensure that Minnesotans of all faiths, and those who adhere to no faith at all, are not left behind because they are unaware of a recovery program that resonates with them.

Overall, this bill seeks to accomplish the following crucial objectives:

- Prevent courts and state agencies from requiring anyone to participate in or attend religious elements of substance use disorder treatment programs to which they object.
- Ensure that individuals who object to mandatory religious substance use disorder treatment programs are able to access appropriate alternative programs.
- Encourage state agencies to recognize a diverse range of substance use disorder treatment programs to meet the needs of all Minnesotans, regardless of their beliefs.
- Modify continuing education requirements so that alcohol and drug counselors are informed about secular treatment approaches and able to better serve all Minnesotans.

This is a good bill that will improve recovery outcomes for many who struggle with addiction issues in Minnesota. I urge you to vote yes on this bill. This bill will go a long way toward ensuring that vast and diverse recovery options are available to all residents of Minnesota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RD' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ryan Dudley
State Policy Manager
FFRF Action Fund