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## OPIOID BILL A "BLUEPRINT" FOR THE NATION, BAKER SAYS AT CEREMONY

By Chris Triunfo

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BOSTON, AUG. 14, 2018....After launching his re-election campaign over the weekend, Gov. Charlie Baker's first move on Tuesday after an official trip out of state to start the week was to draw attention to legislation that aims to expand treatment for opioid addiction across the Bay State.

The law, which had already been officially signed by Baker last week, became one of the success stories to come out of the Legislature in the closing days of formal sessions in July, and has been touted by the governor's re-election campaign as another step taken in curtailing the opioid and heroin epidemic.

This is the second major bill that the governor has signed since taking office in 2015 to fight the crisis that claimed an estimated 2,016 lives in 2017. He marked the occasion Tuesday with a ceremonial signing at a Roxbury recovery center.

The governor spent Monday in Vermont at the annual New England Governors/Eastern Canadian Premiers Conference, making the ceremonial signing his first official public event in Massachusetts since the formal launch of his re-election campaign. At a picnic event in Shrewsbury on Saturday, Baker addressed the work his administration has done and what he sees as left to do to combat the drug crisis.

"We're talking today about a second term. Why? Because there are some things we want to finish the job," Baker told the crowd at the annual Baker-Polito Picnic. "While we have seen for the first time in decades a drop in the number of people dying and the number of people receiving opioid prescriptions and major expansions in our capacity to treat people, we are nowhere near finished on this. We have a long way to go. We need four more years to build on the success of the first four so that we can beat this scourge into the ground once and for all."



Gov. Charlie Baker handed a ceremonial pen to Rep. Denise Garlick, co-chairwoman of the Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery Committee. [Photo: Chris Triunfo/SHNS]

The opioid abuse prevention and treatment bill was one of several enacted by the House and Senate on a harried final day of formal sessions on July 31 when some initiatives, including health care and education funding reforms, fell apart.

Earlier in the month, the Senate scrapped a Ways and Means proposal to established supervised injection sites as part of its version of bill, instead adopting an amendment to study the idea. Supporters retreated after U.S. Attorney Andrew Lelling made clear that such facilities would violate federal law and anyone working at or using one of the sites could be subject to federal criminal charges.

Sen. Cindy Friedman took the lead for the Senate in negotiations over a final bill. Despite supporting proposals such as supervised injection sites that were opposed by the administration, the Arlington Democrat on Tuesday had nothing but kind words for Baker. "There was never a time where we couldn't sit down and have a real conversation to get to yes," Friedman said.

Baker also cited the collaboration between the branches and his administration as essential in the passage of the bill, even though he didn't get everything he had proposed. Most notably, the Legislature did not adopted the governor's proposal to allow doctors to order the involuntary transfer of a patient for treatment for 72 hours. "It was very much a team effort between our administration, the secretary and our colleagues in the legislature," Baker said.

Also in attendance was Middlesex Sheriff Peter Koutoujian, who worked with Friedman and Rep. Denise Garlick to establish medically-assisted substance abuse treatment for incoming prisoners at Cedar Junction and allow detainees and prisoners at the Massachusetts Alcohol and Substance Abuse Center in Plymouth, the women's correctional facility at Framingham and the South Middlesex correctional center who were receiving medication-assisted treatment to continue that course of therapy while behind bars unless it is deemed no longer medically necessary.

As the governor touted the recovery efforts being pursued by the sheriff, Scott Francis, who works with the STEPPOX Recovery Support Center in Roxbury where the event was being held, yelled out, "Recovery is real!"

Baker was joined by House Speaker Robert DeLeo, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders and various members of the legislature who played a role in passing the law. The governor said the efforts in Massachusetts are being replicated by other states around the country.

"This legislation has been used as a blueprint for fighting the epidemic in [46] states," Baker told the crowded room. "It's truly a team effort, and there's a lot more to be done."

The law will also expand access to the overdose reversing drug Narcan, require all prescribers to convert to secure electronic prescriptions by 2020, and take a step toward credentialing recovery coaches.

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