

SENATOR BERNARD-STEVENS: Thank you, Senator Chambers. Senator Pedersen.

SENATOR PEDERSEN: Mr. President, and members of the Legislature, just a couple of things I wanted to note, and when Senator Chambers was talking about how this bill got out of committee, I want to go back, and, Senator Abboud, I need you to respond to a question for me, but do you remember when the amendment came up to lower the penalty for crack cocaine, did I vote for that? If you don't remember, yes, I did. I was one of the ones who carried it out of committee, okay, that voted it out of committee. I voted to bring it down. The reason I did that is I wanted it equal. I did not vote to bring powder up to crack, Senator Chambers, just so this bill would come out of committee. People, it is not the clothing that cocaine wears, whether it come in a liquid form, it can be broken down to a liquid, or crack form, which is rock that is smoked, or whether it is in a powder that you snort. I do believe that it needs to be equal, and I understand that one of the statements was made in committee that, you know, we need to understand that this will make it equal, and I do believe that by leaving powder where it's at, I do not support Senator Chambers' amendment, by leaving powder where it's at that we will have probably more white people charged with the use of cocaine, and I'm okay with that. The equal part I think most of us are okay with. The addiction part, when we talk about those that are...we're picking up junkies on the corner, as Senator Chambers mentioned, that is true. Some of them are dealing to use, but a lot of the people now, the young people especially that are dealing, are dealing because of this money that Senator Chambers was talking about. It is extreme amounts of money, and they can make it so much quicker than having to do anything else, and sometimes doing anything else isn't there as far as other jobs. But the quick money, and, again, we are talking about youth, in some cases. Youth feels the real grown-up status, if they are selling. They also feel like they are a part of something, and if they are a part of a group that is selling, then they are a part of that group and they feel, you know, some of the basic needs of belonging and wanting to feel important. But if we are going to be fair, I believe the penalty should be the same and I have no problem with making the penalty more strenuous for the powder users, bringing it up to crack, than I did bringing crack down to powder. I believe it needs to be equal. And that's why I voted for this amendment, and not just to get the bill out of