



Seattle Human Rights Commission

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Seattle Human Rights Commission Opposes Moratorium on Establishment of Safe Consumption Sites and Urges City of Seattle to Fund

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The Seattle Human Rights Commission writes in opposition to any moratorium on the establishment of funding for safe consumption sites in King County. We have long supported the establishment of safe consumption sites as a harm reduction policy, supported by widespread public health analysis. For this purpose, we have regularly testified to King County Council in support of such sites. And we believe such an intervention is imperative to protect the rights of all, including drug users, to life saving health services and dignity.

In 1963, the City of Seattle declared itself to be a Human Rights City, aspiring to adhere to international human rights law. The commission makes this current statement in furtherance of that aspiration and in reliance on Article 25 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. That instrument guarantees all persons, “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services.” The Declaration does not condition this right on whether or not the person uses certain drugs.

King County and the City of Seattle directed in March 2016 the formation of a multi disciplinary task force of public health experts to study solutions to the local epidemic of opiate and other drug overdoses. Amongst its recommendations, the task force proposed a pilot program to establish two safe sites where drug users could consume drugs under life saving medical supervision and with access to treatment referral services. In directing this study, the County and City appropriately prioritized public health and safety, over useless criminalization.

Several dozen local jurisdictions, throughout the world, have found such initiatives effective in this regard. For example, in 2003, the InSite Safe Injection Center was established in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, one of the highest opioid use areas in the world. Since then, it has proven an incredibly effective harm reduction intervention. 76% of Vancouverites support it. The Vancouver Police Department and local merchant groups have found it effective and have

partnered to support it. Canada is opening more of these sites across the country because they have shown to be effective.

As explained by peer reviewed articles in the Lancet and New England Journal of Medicine, it has led to a 35% decrease in overdose fatalities in the proximate area. And it has done so by protecting the dignity and respecting the health and humanity of all who enter, drug user or not. As a result it has also proven strongly effective in linking users to detoxification, treatment, and sobriety. In addition to saving users' lives, InSite has also led to declines in nearby property crime, litter, and positive interactions with law enforcement.

The opponents of safe consumption sites rely on fear and bad science. They express concerns about the effect of such sites in our neighborhoods when people are already dying in our streets. And they allege that such sites do not work because users continue to use. These critiques all miss the mark.

As I stated, local business groups and police have come out in support of medically supervised facilities based on its proven results in reducing fatality and, importantly, moving usage indoors out of the sight of the public and especially children. If usage continues, it is because usage is based on many factors. The absence of sufficient housing or mental health services. The historic trauma many marginalized communities over represented amongst the homeless face and seek to cope with.

Safe consumption sites do not provide the panacea for all these issues and we must continue to confront them as well. But they do their job in reducing harm and in demonstrating that our community values and protects all lives. It is the Commission's perspective, and that memorialized in human rights law, that drug users are our neighbors, our fellow Seattlites, and our fellow human beings. As many community advocates have noted, the moratorium and initiative process will cost lives in the interim. For this reason, the Commission opposes any such moratorium and urges the establishment of safe consumption sites with all deliberate speed.

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