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October 26, 2023

House Behavioral Health Sub Committee  
124 N. Capitol Ave  
Lansing, MI 48933

Subject: Support for HB 5178 & HB 5179

Dear House Behavioral Health Sub Committee,

We write in strong support of House Bill 5178 and House Bill 5179 (2023). As a Harm Reduction agency who has been providing syringe access programs to the Flint and surrounding areas for over 10 years. We recognize that this bill is not full decriminalization of risk reduction tools for everyone, but it will authorize the establishment and operation of syringe service programs. Currently, these programs are restricted throughout the great state of Michigan by municipal policy-1700+ municipalities in Michigan maintain and enforce paraphernalia ordinances that criminalize the possession of risk reduction supplies.

The criminalization of drug paraphernalia interferes with public health and the expansion efforts within the state's own opioid response strategy headed by MDHHS. Lack of access to sterile supplies increases the risk of HIV, Hepatitis C, and overdose. Michiganders are spending millions of dollars yearly on healthcare costs from lack of access to sterile supplies such as syringes.

In addition to solving these issues and a host of others, HB 5178 & HB 5179 should be updated to include a provision for second- and third-party distributions to be added to the language of these bills. It is imperative to include these omissions for such purposes to allow places like shelters, street medicine teams as well as other social service programs/agency that are not syringe service programs to distribute these life saving tools without fear of arrests and/or prosecution for themselves or their clients. Urgent action is required to fix these issues because it hurts your constituents and places additional burdens on emergency rooms and healthcare facilities' staff and capacity.

HB 5178 and HB 5179 would help programs like Wellness Services' syringe service program to open a secondary location within its newly acquired clinic space. This new agency location is currently within a municipality that maintains and enforces paraphernalia ordinances which HB 5178 & HB 5179 would eliminate that existing barrier. It would allow the agency the freedom to operate without fear of arrest or prosecution of staff or our clients. It would provide the community the access to life saving supplies that they need to prevent HIV, Hepatitis C, and overdose.

Sincerely,



Yashica Ellis  
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