



CITY OF PROVIDENCE

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

February 9th, 2021

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chair, House Health and Human Services Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Honorable Chair Casey and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of House Bill 5245, AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY - HARM REDUCTION CENTER ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND PILOT PROGRAM, to authorize a pilot program to prevent drug overdoses through the establishment of harm reduction centers, locations where persons may safely consume pre-obtained controlled substances.

As Mayor of Providence, I am gravely concerned by the opioid overdose crisis that continues to impact people in our city every year. According to the RI Department of Health, Providence had the highest percentage of opioid overdose-related Emergency Department visits and EMS runs in the State of RI from 2016 to 2019. While Rhode Island has made great efforts to reduce opioid-related overdoses and deaths, we are still losing too many people to this substance use disorder. It is imperative that the State of Rhode Island thinks creatively and explores innovative public health solutions to reduce the impact of this crisis.

Communities across the country are considering harm reduction centers as a way to facilitate access to social services and health resources for hard to reach populations, reduce the risk of infectious diseases, and reduce drug use and overdose mortality. By connecting people who use drugs with necessary health care professionals to prevent overdoses and make referrals for counseling or other medical treatment, the harm reduction centers may significantly reduce the impact of the overdose crisis on our communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill to create a harm reduction advisory committee and pilot program to support the health of all Rhode Islanders. We look forward to working collaboratively with the Rhode Island Department of Health to implement this pilot.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Elorza".

Mayor Jorge O. Elorza

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