

Friday, March 17, 2023

Rep. Kelly Moller
509 State Office Building
100 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55155

Madam Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for hearing HF 2041. This bill will decrease the likelihood of an individual with substance use disorder who uses syringes contracting a blood borne disease from an unclean syringe. It will also prevent inadvertent exposure to adulterated drugs. Our Addiction Medicine Division is an important part of our safety net health system. Addiction Medicine at Hennepin Healthcare provides three main clinical services: an opioid treatment program, an office-based addiction treatment clinic, and inpatient addiction medicine consultation services. In each of these services, we daily see the medical consequences of injection drug use, especially when there is limited access to clean and safe injection supplies.

Syringe service programing is a harm reduction strategy that focuses on minimizing the negative health consequences related to injection drug use, like infections and overdoses. Syringe service programs have a strong evidence base and are proven to reduce the transmission of HIV and reducing skin and soft tissue infections. Syringe service programs are endorsed by several public health bodied including the US CDC and the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, and several law enforcement agencies throughout the United States (e.g. North Carolina Sherriff's Association).

Syringe service programs help build relationships and trust with community health organizations and healthcare providers who are ready to assist when someone wants to begin treatment. Participation in syringe service programs increase uptake of treatment and recovery services and increase testing and treatment for HIV and viral hepatitis, which is of particular importance given the CDC-declared outbreaks in Hennepin and St. Louis counties. While clean syringes are the tangible reasons for such programs, the healthy human connections, counseling services and treatment resources are the intangible reasons.

This bill will help reduce harm in several ways. Removing the requirement to return used needles lifts a burden for someone who may have otherwise sought out a clean syringe and instead, used an old one. Allowing individuals to distribute clean syringes "second hand" increases access to people who might not have the resources or means to use the program directly on their own, but who would benefit from access to clean syringes from someone they know in the community. This is of particular importance in our rural communities. Removing the limit of ten or fewer sales for hypodermic needles or syringes without a prescription or direction of a practitioner will help people who use injectable drugs access the amount of syringes they will actually use, therefore limiting the reuse of unclean needles. Finally, modifying the definition of "drug paraphernalia" by removing equipment used for testing the strength, effectiveness, or purity of a controlled substance, and removing the limitation on possessing hypodermic syringes or needles for subcutaneous injections will further help reduce infections and death, without meaningfully affecting prosecution of drug laws.

Hennepin Healthcare supports these measures and encourages the committee to pass HF 2041.



Sincerely,

Dr. Gavin Bart
Addiction Medicine Clinic
Hennepin Healthcare

Dr. Charlie Reznikoff
Addiction Medicine Clinic
Hennepin Healthcare