



March 16th, 2023

To whom it may concern,

Southside Harm Reduction Services is writing this letter to express our strong support of bill HF2041. We believe that this bill aligns with Minnesota's values of equity, justice, and healthy communities for all Minnesotans. HF2041 will support our communities in better addressing the ongoing overdose crisis and HIV outbreak.

Southside Harm Reduction Services is currently the largest syringe service program in the state, offering comprehensive harm reduction services across Minneapolis. We started in 2017 as a small, grassroots, volunteer run program in response to increasing overdose rates in Indigenous communities in East Phillips. We center meeting people wherever they are at, both metaphorically and literally, focusing on building strong and trusting relationships with people who use drugs and communities impacted by the ongoing overdose crisis in MN.

Our state is currently facing record high overdose rates that, while they heavily impact all communities, impact communities of color at highly disproportionate rates. Black Minnesotans are 2 to 3 times as likely to die from overdose as White Minnesotans while Native Americans are 7 times as likely to die from overdose as White Minnesotans. The disparity between White and Native American deaths in MN is among the highest in the country. At the same time, we have 2 HIV outbreaks related to injection drug use, one in the Twin Cities and the other in the Duluth area.

This bill is a step toward treating drug use as a health issue and not a criminal one. We know that arresting our way out of the overdose crisis and HIV outbreak will not, and has not, worked. Instead, this bill works to embrace evidence-based harm reduction strategies that place people first and support Minnesotans, wherever they are at. Syringe service programs, like Southside Harm Reduction Services, are an intervention that is supported by the CDC. They are incredibly effective at reducing overdose deaths, the transmission of HIV and other infectious diseases related to drug use, linking people to treatment, health care, housing, and more.

We consistently hear from participants that they fear being charged for carrying harm reduction supplies, supplies that help improve and protect the health of themselves as well as their communities. Fear of being charged for having paraphernalia has been shown to increase the likelihood that people who inject drugs will share or reuse syringes, increasing the risk of infections related to drug use. Fear of persecution for having syringes also increases the probability that syringes are not disposed of properly. Charges related to paraphernalia can also increase the number of interactions with the criminal justice system when we should be working to connect Minnesotans to care and services that they want and need.

For all the above reasons Southside Harm Reduction Services strongly supports bill HF2041 and believe that this is an important step in addressing deep inequalities in our state and creating healthy and safe communities for all Minnesotans.



Jack Martin
Executive Director
Southside Harm Reduction Services