



The Honorable Kevin Hertel
Chairperson, Health Policy Committee
Room 1100, Binsfeld Office Building
201 Townsend Street
Lansing, MI 48933
October 25, 2023

SUPPORT - House Bill 5178 and 5179

Dear Senator Hertel and Health Policy Committee members,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 5178 and HB 5179, which seeks to authorize the establishment and operation of syringe service programs in our state while simultaneously amending the existing public health code to remove criminal penalties for distribution, possession, and use of tools aimed at reducing health risks associated with the use of substances currently categorized as "drug paraphernalia." In my capacity as the Deputy Director of Clinical Operations at the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), I am of the firm belief that this legislation marks a substantial stride toward effectively addressing the intricate challenges posed by substance use and its related health risks within our community.

In contrast to outdated misconceptions, syringe service programs (SSPs) and the resources offered by harm reduction organizations do not encourage drug use. On the contrary, numerous studies have shown that individuals who engage with SSPs are more likely to seek treatment for their substance use. Additionally, SSPs and the materials they provide play a significant role in reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C, conditions that place a substantial financial burden on our healthcare system. Similarly, fentanyl test strips function as a vital harm reduction tool, effectively preventing fatalities by alerting drug users to the primary cause of the annual surge in overdose deaths.

As a nonprofit organization based in Southeast Michigan, we currently provide extensive SSP and Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)/Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) services. We confront the dire consequences of unsafe drug use on a daily basis. To date, our SSP initiatives have distributed over one million harm reduction supplies. The existing stigma surrounding substance misuse is only exacerbated by policies that restrict access to harm reduction materials and treatment options, and that instead impose penalties on those who possess or distribute these essential tools. The establishment of secure SSP programs stands as a critical element in our battle against the overdose crisis, working to prevent the loss of yet another life each day.

Below, kindly find three testimonials from clients who have received assistance from ACCESS's SSP Program and have subsequently commenced treatment at our medical center:

"Hands down everyone in the office played a huge part of me and my fiancé successfully getting ourselves off drugs. We originally began coming for the harm reduction program. We spent a lot of time talking with the staff and whenever we mentioned getting clean, they always let us know they would help but they never pushed us to do so either. Hands down the best doctor's office I've been to and being and addict doctors don't always treat you with the amount of care people deserve. This place was a blessing when we needed it most."

“This Access clinic with Dr Amanda and Dr. Sarah, I contribute them to saving my life I have been dealing with opiate addiction for 10 years they have kept me in remission for the past five. I love them.”

“Have already recommended you to several friends who are now your patients. Andrew and Dr. Mayuri Bharathan (located at the 14 mile and Ryan office) have played key roles in my recovery.”

I urge you to support and champion HB 5178 and HB 5179. By doing so, you will be taking a significant step towards a more compassionate, effective, and evidence-based approach to substance use and addiction in our state. It is essential that we prioritize public health and the well-being of our citizens by embracing harm reduction strategies and providing individuals with the support they need to lead healthier, more productive lives. **I ask that the Health Policy Committee give HB 5178 and HB 5179 a favorable report with revisions for 2nd and 3rd party distributors added to the language.**

Sincerely,



Jessica Kowalski

Deputy Director, Clinical Operations

ACCESS Community Health and Research Center

6450 Maple Street

Dearborn MI. 48126

Phone: 313-203-1790