



Vermont Interfaith Action

Transforming People and Communities

February 27, 2024

Senate Health & Welfare Committee
Sen. Ginny Lyons, Chair

Dear Senators,

The organization of which I am Executive Director, Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA), is a federation of over 70 member and affiliated congregations throughout the state, encompassing approximately 16,000 Vermonters. VIA's members strongly support H72, which would establish Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs) as a lynchpin in the effort to take a harm reduction approach to the rampant drug use in our state.

We write to encourage the Health and Welfare Committee to recommend passage of H72 to the full Senate. OPCs will provide a safe, clean setting for those who would otherwise use drugs out on the street or in public places – often on the grounds of our faith communities – so that they can be monitored by professionals. OPCs save lives, keeping individuals from overdosing alone and out in the cold. OPCs provide help by trained persons – instead of one of our pastors or a church secretary or groundskeeper – if naloxone needs to be administered. And OPCs remove the stigma and provide the support to convince individuals to enroll in treatment programs and start their recoveries.

The efficacy of OPCs in other states is demonstrated by well-documented evidence. For example, On Point in New York City has succeeded in saving 1,200 individuals from potentially fatal overdoses. Regarding efficacy, one thing is clear: what we are currently doing in Vermont and most of the rest of the country is not working when it comes to public drug use. It is time we step up as a society to try a new path, based more on compassion and treatment than arrests and incarceration.

Please pass H72 out of committee as soon as possible. No Vermonter can receive the help they need to be saved from drug use if they have already lost their life to an overdose.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Debbie Ingram

Rev. Debbie Ingram
Executive Director, Vermont Interfaith Action