

Good Afternoon,

I write to you all today in defense of OPS services. I am proud to join many others who have written in in favor of this bill. As a harm reductionist I'm not in the business of judging people, of denying them care, or of stigmatizing them for what they do.

I am in the business of listening to people, serving people, and saving lives. I am in the business of offering comprehensive care that meets people where they are. I am in the business of helping people reach the goals they've set for themselves with the tools available to us, but enough about me- What I'd like to know is what business you are in.

Are you in the business of purporting to care? The business of enforcing abstinence-based models that have historically never worked? The business of turning folks away while people die in the street? Or are you in the same business I'm in?

In these last several months as the world has navigated uncharted territory there has been an emphasis on public health and communal care like never before, and its been so amazing to see what happens when our government prioritizes health and safety of citizens, and the unfortunate reality of what happens when it doesn't.

The landscape of substance use shows what happens when it doesn't. There has been a pandemic of preventable harm in this country for seemingly endless years and seemingly no desire to mitigate nor stop it. Every year people die preventable deaths because of an over emphasis on abstinence and punitivity than commitment to care and empathy; care and empathy that we've seen are possible from our civil servants. We understand communities self-regulate and know themselves best and that is exactly why We want to keep power in communities while prioritizing harm reduction and safety.

As a harm reduction peer brilliantly pointed out to me recently, the reality is we already have consumption sites: they take the form of alleyways, abandoned homes, port-a-pottys, Burger King bathrooms, bus stops, and other dark corners. These same spaces serves as graves when people aren't empowered to be safer.

We can continue to ignore and invisibilize people or we can serve them. We can continue to punish and preach abstinence, or we can join the other 60 countries in the world who already offer OPS, countries where these centers have never seen a single fatal overdose.

The choice is yours.

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