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March 11, 2024

Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Chair Lyons and members of the Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare,

I'm writing as Ben & Jerry's Global Social Mission Director in support of H.72 and the creation of Overdose Prevention Centers in Vermont.

As you know, Ben & Jerry's is a Vermont-grown company that started in a renovated gas station in downtown Burlington and now employs more than 500 people across 4 sites in Vermont and has global sales of more than 1 billion dollars a year. You'll also know that Ben & Jerry's is well known for being guided by our progressive values that advance the Social Mission of the company.

Our Social Mission aspires to meet human needs and eliminate injustices in our local, national, and international communities. We believe we must use our platform and power to address big issues facing our communities, including issues of racial justice and the role of our criminal legal system that perpetuates deep inequities.

That is why we strongly support H.72 and the protections it offers individuals and organizations who will provide life-saving services at Overdose Prevention Centers in Vermont. Treating substance use disorder with proven public health strategies is critical to interrupting the role that the criminal legal system plays in perpetuating racial disparities and further harming individuals suffering from a medical condition.

As a company that understands the importance of research and data to drive our business day in and day out, there is a large body of research that tells us that these centers have proven results worldwide and tremendous potential here in Vermont. Overdose Prevention Centers will save lives. With record numbers of overdose fatalities in recent years, Vermont can't afford to wait on implementing a strategy that can help to reduce deaths, improve health outcomes, and raise quality of life standards in communities.

While this policy aligns with our values, it's also an issue that has had a direct effect on the company. Our flagship scoop shop on Burlington's Church Street has had to close our restrooms in recent years because of multiple overdoses occurring in them. Our store has amongst the highest foot traffic on the Church Street Market and we want to provide our visitors access to restrooms, however, we have not been able to do that. Our staff has had to confront firsthand the dangers of people using alone, in settings that don't provide the kind of health and safety protections readily available in an OPC. These realities have been challenging for our staff and customers, as well as for Burlington's Church Street Marketplace, where many of our neighbors are suffering visibly.

Studies have shown that in addition to all the life-saving, public health benefits that OPCs provide, they also improve neighborhood quality of life without increasing crime. Public drug use and litter go down in areas that host these sites.

We urge your committee and the legislature to pass H.72, so Vermont can move swiftly in implementing these important centers and saving lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Chris Miller", written in a cursive style.

Christopher Miller
Global Social Mission Director
Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc.