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Act No. 178 (H.72). An act relating to a harm-reduction criminal justice response to drug use

Subjects: Crimes; health; human services; regulated drugs

This act establishes statutory requirements for an overdose prevention center and provides limited criminal and civil immunity to those who use the services of a center and the individuals and entities who operate the center in accordance with rules adopted by the Department of Health. Among other services regarding harm reduction, an overdose prevention center provides a space, either at a fixed location or a mobile facility, supervised by health care professionals or other trained staff where persons who use drugs can consume preobtained drugs and medication for substance use disorder.

The act appropriates in FY 25 \$1,100,000.00 to the Department of Health from the Opioid Abatement Special Fund for the purpose of awarding grants to the City of Burlington for establishing an overdose prevention center upon submission of a grant proposal that has been approved by the Burlington City Council and meets the requirements of 18 V.S.A. § 4256, including the guidelines developed by the Department of Health. The Department of Health is required to report on or before October 1, 2024, January 1, 2025, April 1, 2025, and July 1, 2025, to the Joint Fiscal Committee and the Joint Health Reform Oversight Committee regarding the status of distribution of the grants to Burlington.

On or before December 1, 2024, the Department of Health is directed to contract with a researcher or independent consulting entity with expertise in the field of rural addiction or overdose prevention centers, or both, to study the impact of the overdose prevention center pilot program authorized in Sec. 2 of this act. The study shall evaluate the current impacts of the overdose crisis in Vermont, as well as any changes up to four years following the implementation of the overdose prevention center pilot program. The study is funded in FY 25 with a \$300,000.00 appropriation to the Department of Health from the Opioid Abatement Special Fund.

Effective Date: June 17, 2024