

Dear Ruth,

I hope all is well with you and as always, I thank you for your service. As you may know I am in my fifth year of service as a Brattleboro Selectboard member. In your role as a member of the Health and Welfare Committee in the Vermont State Senate, I'm hoping that you will look closely at my concerns regarding Bill H.72, Safe Injection Sites aka Overdose Prevention Centers. I understand the bill seeks two locations in the state for a facility such as this: one in Burlington and one in Southern Vermont. I've been told that House members recommended Brattleboro to be one of those towns. A number of residents have strenuously told our House and Senate delegation they do not want this in Brattleboro. And I understand that the House bill has a stipulation that the town must opt in to want this facility. But I further understand that legislators are trying to remove that amendment.

What I'm hearing in those who support a safe injection site is a de-emphasis on treatment, but we need to remember that treatment is the greatest support we can give to our fellow Vermonters in addiction. Treatment is the only way out, and frankly, this safe injection site is one more unnecessary stop on the path to treatment and recovery. Vermont needs to fully fund robust, long-term residential treatment, if we are serious about stopping addiction and restoring our people to our community. Right now, we have just a few private insurance and Medicaid based treatment which is 14 to 21 days in duration. That is not a recipe for success, it is far from robust. We also need court ordered diversion to treatment that is free, residential and longer term that leads to successful recovery. Another thing that the legislature should be focusing on is sober housing for those who have just successfully completed treatment, to keep the success going as they re-enter our community.

None of those needed elements are within this bill for safe injection sites. And I find a host of impracticalities and unintended consequences will result from a safe injection site in Brattleboro, none of which I want for our town. Permit me to explain to you why the town manager, our police chief and I, as well as other members of the selectboard have questioned the siting of this facility in Brattleboro:

- The drugs that would be injected in this facility are illegal, at both the state and federal level. The facility would not be supplying the illegal drugs to people using its services. This facility would, then, encourage the continuation of drug dealing in our town, which is a problem that we're trying diligently to diminish. This injection facility assumes illegal drug activity continues, outside of this site, unabated, thus not solving the crime problem and chaos brought on by illegal drug sales, including victimization, robberies and prostitution.
- Brattleboro is the first stop drug dealers make travelling up Route 91. The more they find this initial safe haven and concentration of protected drug users, the harder it is to eradicate this activity from our town. The accused ax murderer of a Brattleboro social worker one year ago has stated that the availability of drugs in Vermont brought her to Brattleboro. We believe this facility in and of itself would become a further magnet for both drug dealers and users. We are also at the corner of the state, bordering both New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and both drug dealers and drug users have settled here for this purpose.
- Brattleboro is also one of the regional centers designated for housing the homeless in the state motel program. This has added to our town's population of people suffering from opioid addiction. We also house the Brattleboro Retreat which serves as a similar draw to people with substance use disorders and related challenging issues. While these people need help with treatment, we believe that a permissive injection facility will only add to the chaos in our town.

- Brattleboro currently has a host of social services which address the needs of this vulnerable population-- which reduce harm to the opioid user. We have needle exchange and substance testing; a methadone clinic; a recovery facility; in addition, community members, including all town staff, have been trained in alternative harm reduction strategies including the administration of Narcan. Our police and Fire/EMS do not arrest folks experiencing overdoses, but after they revive them, refer them to recovery coaches, who follow up with voluntary counseling. This injection site facility would serve as one more social service that is not robust addiction treatment. We need robust treatment and recovery facilities in Brattleboro and throughout Vermont. The money to be spent on safe injection facilities could be better spent providing recovery, occupational therapy, and safe sober housing for recovery addicts.
- We welcome the planned statewide mobile drug court docket, with diversion to treatment. "What if everyone with a drug problem who was caught up in the criminal justice system had access to a comprehensive and long-term recovery program like this?" Please read Nick Kristof's article and quote below: [https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/14/opinion/drug-addiction-recovery.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.XU0.i5RW.1 IQnLLoyhVb&smid=url-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/14/opinion/drug-addiction-recovery.html?unlocked_article_code=1.XU0.i5RW.1 IQnLLoyhVb&smid=url-share)

*“The United States has some 17,000 substance use clinics, but frankly, many of them don't seem particularly effective. When someone has wrestled with addiction for many years, a brief period of detox and counseling may be helpful but is often a thin and fleeting intervention. In addition, these programs are frequently expensive and thus inaccessible. Medicaid provides some coverage, but it's inadequate and depends on the state the patient lives in. Women in Recovery would be unaffordable for most participants if they had to pay for it themselves; people in the program joke that they were lucky to be arrested and thus get access to it. What sets Women in Recovery apart and helps it succeed, I think, is that it lasts 18 months for a typical woman — much longer than most recovery programs — and is comprehensive, aiming to restore her mental health, reunite her with her children, teach her a skill, get her a job, coach her on financial literacy and knit her back into a community.”*

In contrast, the proposed safe injection site is a mixed message on drug use from the state – is it okay to do illegal drugs or not, if not, are there any consequences?

- It is our understanding that where safe injection sites have had limited success in the past were in areas with a heroin epidemic, not places like Brattleboro struggling with a fentanyl, xylazine, and methamphetamine problem, a much different social and pharmacological challenge. We are further confused by the emerging shift by people with opioid addictions to smoking many of these drugs rather than injecting them and how that could be accommodated without harm to facility workers, other people with opioid addiction, and the facility itself.
- If such a facility were to be established in Brattleboro, it would be the smallest town ever for such action, all other projects are for much larger cities in the United States and Canada with better pathways to treatment and more significant

concentrations of people in need. All the more reason that it is totally inappropriate for us.

- The federal government is currently funding [a study](#) of how well overdose prevention sites work, with a grant of more than \$5 million over 4 years. Let's see the results of that study before we act in Brattleboro.

Ruth, let's not jump on this bandwagon until the federal study is complete. Please reject this plan for Brattleboro. At the absolute minimum, please keep the amendment to allow Brattleboro and other towns to have a say whether this facility is located in our town or elsewhere. And let's focus and spend state money on funding more robust treatment instead!

Best regards,

Liz McLoughlin

Brattleboro Selectboard