

MA Coalition for Supervised Consumption Sites Urges Action on Aubri's Law

BOSTON, February 14, 2022— Today, the Massachusetts for Supervised Consumption Sites (MA4SCS) Coalition thanked the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery for extending the deadline by which the Committee could take action on “An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment,” which is also known as “Aubri’s Law” to May 9. The MA4SCS Coalition also called on members of the Joint Committee to complete their review of the bill and move it to the full House and Senate for a vote.

Aubri’s Law would permit the creation of supervised consumption sites in Massachusetts which offer people who use drugs a safe option for consuming pre-obtained drugs. Accidental overdoses can be immediately treated with Narcan. To date, there have been no overdose fatalities recorded at any of the 120 supervised consumption sites operating in 10 countries.

“Since 2000, over 22,000 people in Massachusetts have died of opioid overdoses. Among those who have lost their lives are [Danny Vigliano](#), a guitar-playing 35-year-old resident of Cape Cod who struggled with isolation during the early days of the pandemic. Michael Woodbury and his brother Jonathan of Pembroke [died of opioid overdoses on the same day in 2016](#), leaving their parents, friends, and other loved ones utterly devastated,” said Carl Sciortino, Executive Vice President of External Relations at Fenway Health. “Each of these lives cut short to opioid addiction is testament to the fact that the [first step to successful drug treatment is staying alive](#). The state’s public health response to this epidemic must include supervised consumption sites, which keep people safe and out of harm’s way until they are ready to seek treatment.”

“Safe consumption sites are an evidenced-based approach to immediately reduce opioid-related overdose deaths, which persist, especially with such widespread contamination of drug supplies in the Commonwealth,” said Dr. Carole E. Allen, president of the Massachusetts Medical Society. “First and foremost, these facilities save lives—period. They also offer a critical avenue to medical care and other services to those experiencing addiction who otherwise may not have one. That’s why I am so pleased to have my colleagues from diverse medical specialties and settings of care join MMS in supporting this initiative.”

“Substance use is a public health matter, not a criminal matter,” added Berkshire County District Attorney Andrea Harrington. “The criminalization, over-prosecution, and stigmatization of people who use drugs has directly contributed to year-over-year increases in fatal overdose deaths throughout Massachusetts generally, and Berkshire County, specifically. Fear of judgment and prosecution drive people who use drugs into the shadows, when we should be implementing public policies that encourage people to seek treatment instead.”

“Supervised consumption sites are necessary and lifesaving,” said Becky, a Lynn resident, person who uses substances, and member of the Coalition for Supervised Consumption Sites.

“I think it would be awesome if had one,” added Derek, a Lynn resident, person who uses substances, and member of the Coalition for Supervised Consumption Sites. “There would be fewer overdoses. With people there to watch, no one would leave anyone behind to OD and die.”

"Every day people who use drugs are building makeshift systems to keep themselves and each other safe, and they are telling us that safe consumption sites would save lives," said Rachel Bolton, Harm Reductionist and Steering Committee member of Safe Injection Facilities (SIFMA) Now, which is a member of the MA4SCS Coalition. "We need to be responsive."

Over the long term, supervised consumption sites connect people who use drugs with health care services such as counseling, medical and behavioral health services, and substance use treatment. After opening a supervised consumption site, the city of Vancouver recorded 70 percent fewer calls for emergency ambulance responses to drug overdoses and saw emergency hospital admissions of people who inject drugs decrease 75 percent. A study of people who inject drugs at a supervised consumption site in Copenhagen found that nearly 60 percent eventually enrolled in treatment programs for substance use.

The evidence that supervised consumption sites saves lives is so compelling that the state of Rhode Island [enacted a law last summer](#) to create a pilot program for community-based supervised consumption sites. Last November New York City, where over 2,000 people [died of opioid overdoses](#) in 2020, launched the first [government-backed supervised consumption site](#) in the nation.

Although federal authorities can intervene with local and state initiatives to create supervised consumption sites under the Controlled Substances Act, public health policy and opinion has shifted so far in favor of these settings that some municipalities, such as the city of Somerville, are moving forward with plans to save lives even without the imprimatur of state approval.

"Opioid overdose fatalities [increased nearly fivefold](#), or 460 percent, in Massachusetts from 2000 through 2020 and nearly every one of these deaths was preventable," added Sciortino. "Investment in proven public health measures such as supervised consumption sites holds the potential to save lives, mitigate on-going trauma, and reduce suffering."

About the Massachusetts for Supervised Consumption Sites Coalition

The Massachusetts for Supervised Consumption Sites Coalition is a broad array public health and medical experts and organizations as well as people from across the Commonwealth who have lost loved ones to substance use disorder or struggle with substance use disorder themselves.