WHITMAN-WALKER HEALTH

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Statement of Whitman-Walker Health in Support of Safehouse and Supervised Consumption Sites
December 3, 2019

Whitman-Walker Health is a leading provider of health care and prevention services in the Washington, DC metropolitan area to people living with or at risk of HIV; persons struggling with substance use disorders; and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning/Queer (LGBTQ) community. Our health care providers and community health workers have extensive, firsthand experience with the tragic epidemic of overdoses in our community, and with how substance use disorders continue to fuel the HIV and Hepatitis C epidemics and otherwise devastate our city. This crisis calls for much greater attention from governments at all levels, and for an emphasis on new as well as established harm reduction strategies. This includes support for appropriately conceived and carefully administered supervised consumption sites.

Safehouse's proposal, which has broad support from community leaders and public health officials in Philadelphia, is an innovative step forward that needs to proceed. The proposal has been carefully scrutinized by the Federal District Court in Philadelphia, which concluded in a detailed, thoughtful decision that it does not violate federal drug law. As Judge McHugh declared, the intent of Safehouse is not to encourage substance use, but to save lives by administering naloxone during overdoses, and to assist persons struggling with substance use disorders to receive the health care and other services they need to combat their affliction. The legal issues will doubtless be ultimately resolved by the appellate courts, but while appeals are pending we urge the U.S. Attorney and other federal authorities to desist from threats and to allow this important innovation to move forward. We hope that other communities will also explore this potentially promising response to the ongoing HIV and Hepatitis C epidemics, and to the opioid epidemic that has engulfed our nation.

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