City of Placerville
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November 14, 2023

Alessandra Ross
Marjorie Katz
California Department of Public Health
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Dear Ms. Ross and Ms. Katz,

During our November 8th meeting conducted with representatives from the State of California, local elected officials, and law enforcement, we believe that it has been clearly illustrated that City of Placerville, City of South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County have a significant interest in the operation of Syringe Services Programs (SSP) within their respective jurisdictions. Due to the real potential for negative impacts on the health and safety of our community along with the well documented failure to comply with the provisions of the Health and Safety Code Section 121349, we must oppose the approval of Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition (SHRC), or any other SSP, to operate within the City of Placerville. Given the extremely troubled history of prior SSPs, the Placerville Police Chief and the City Council of Placerville vehemently, in the strongest of terms, object to a Syringe Services Program within our jurisdiction.

The Placerville Police Department has long battled the drug epidemic that has plagued the United States. In the City of Placerville, we have consistently fought against the acceptance and attempts to normalize illicit drug use through educational programs, including "1 Pill Can Kill", "Drug Abuse Awareness Education (DARE)," "Red Ribbon Week," "Every 15 Minutes," and "The Right Choice." These programs are time and resource-intensive and require hundreds of hours of staff time and funding that we do not receive from any state program. We do this because we are invested in the health and safety of our community. A community that a vast majority of us also call home. This discussion should be regarding funding for those programs listed above that discourage and educate the public on the dangers of illicit drug use rather than programs like SSP that condone it.

The primary goal of our educational outreach is to reduce the acceptance of drug abuse in our community, reduce the number of lives destroyed, and prevent the deaths of our most vulnerable residents. Additionally, the Placerville Police Department has designated detectives, assigned to the

Crime Reduction Team, whose sole focus is to identify and hold accountable individuals who are responsible for distributing illicit substances within our city.

The proposed SSP significantly undermines these efforts in a demonstrated tangible way. This is precisely the wrong message to send to our most vulnerable population in the name of "harm reduction." By giving free needles to intravenous drug users, this SSP will encourage and promote the use of addicting drugs. It also increases drug use acceptance, leading to higher drug abuse rates. This is precisely the opposite of the goal that the City of Placerville Police Department, our elected officials, and non-profits have worked for decades to decrease.

In jurisdictions where intravenous drug users are encouraged to safely participate in needle exchange programs, enforcement of drug laws is often discouraged. This will undoubtedly pressure the Placerville Police Department to ignore illegal drug use in those areas targeted for needle exchanges. It will also lessen the feeling of safety for those locals who frequent those areas for legitimate purposes due to the influx of addicts looking for free needles. So not only are we battling a drug epidemic, we are also spending a significant amount of time listening to those experiencing the fear of crime. This includes not only City residents, but our local businesses that the City depends on for revenue.

In addition to normalizing illegal drug use, the distribution of hypodermic needles will undoubtedly increase the number of hypodermic needles circulating throughout our City. Since the pause in Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition (SRHC) activities, we have seen a reduction in the number of discarded needles throughout town. While it is speculative that there is a correlation between the pause in SHRC activities and the number of hypodermic needles circulating throughout our City, it is a good example of the efforts we are undertaking to curb this concern.

Regrettably, the individuals receiving free needles for drug use are not typically the most accountable for properly disposing of them. As mentioned, Police Chief Wren watched SHRC distribute their items in an unmarked vehicle for approximately an hour. He watched as person after person arrived for the briefest periods of time to collect the items and then leave. Not once did he witness used needles being turned in. Even when approached at this distribution point, Chief Wren asked to see their sharps container and it had far less needles than persons who had shown up. At no time did Chief Wren see SHRC have any meaningful engagement with this population. They were mission-focused in handing out these products, and that was it.

The City of Placerville strongly opposes models of syringe distribution that have shown to increase the number of dirty needles discarded recklessly in our parks, streets, and recreational areas, putting our residents in danger.

When drug use increases, this behavior directly harms public safety, property values, community growth, and local businesses. In addition to the concerns surrounding SHRCs street-based mobile distribution, there is no guarantee that needles delivered to residences will be used privately at a residence. The Police Department has repeatedly seen homeowners allow the use of their addresses by those in our homeless community for mail and other services. While this isn't undesirable, allowing this same practice of delivering needles to private residences will inevitably increase the use of these needles in

public spaces. Our Police Officers and CRT Detectives have routinely reported finding discarded needles when patrolling in areas frequented by the homeless population; these also happen to be the same areas where families and children recreate, including bike trails, parks, and walking paths.

The City of Placerville has aggressively sought solutions to address the local homelessness issue and reduce the tragic deaths resulting from illegal drug use. We all know that unlawful drug use is a significant problem among our homeless population. By harm reduction actively taking steps to lessen the stigma of intravenous drug use and encouraging illegal drug use through implementing an SSP, we are actively working against all our best efforts to reduce these tragic deaths, reduce the problems surrounding homelessness, and actively undermine the anti-drug educational programs aimed towards our residents and children.

As stated by the Chief of Police at the November 8th meeting, harm reduction already exists in El Dorado County. Through our Public Health Department and Marshall Hospital, a safe clinical environment exists to provide a clean needle exchange. We believe that in a clinical environment, where professionals can put "eyes on" this population, there is a greater chance of addressing any health-related issues and providing a pathway to finding tangible help. The proposed "mobile" model that SHRC will engage in is clearly not the answer, and we would argue our staff in the field does a better job of creating relationships and assisting people in finding a path forward.

We understand that Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition has submitted an updated application regarding operating in El Dorado County and that the public comment period will close on November 27, 2023. The intent and purpose of this letter is to formally request that this updated application be rejected, and their contract not be renewed. We also request that no other Harm Reduction Services be authorized to operate in El Dorado County.

In closing, we would like to thank the California Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS (CDPH/OA) for meeting to confer on this matter. As the Chief of Placerville Police, I have had many conversations and I understand the expectations of our community as it pertains to public health and safety. Overwhelmingly, this mobile model project is rejected by our community and there will undoubtedly be push back if it is implemented.

As Mayor of the City of Placerville, I, too, strongly object to the proposed SSP due to the dangers listed here. We urge the CDPH/OA to reject approval of this application in favor and support other programs for our community that will clearly provide a greater level of public health.

Respectfully,
City of Placerville

Joseph Wren, Chief of Police

Mayor Michael Saragosa