



City of Placerville

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June 22, 2023

Alessandra Ross, MPH
Chief, Harm Reduction Unit
CA Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS
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Dear Ms. Ross,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the reauthorization of Sierra Harm Reduction's syringe exchange program. The City of Placerville is sending this letter supporting the position of El Dorado County regarding denial of the 2023 reauthorization of Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition's services for a syringe exchange program in El Dorado County and the City of Placerville.

Based on the discussions we have had with El Dorado County, and information we have been provided with, we are unanimous in our opposition to Sierra Harm Reduction's services and activities on the West Slope of El Dorado County. Based on local data and evidence provided, we do not believe that local conditions exist that show the rapid spread of HIV, viral hepatitis or other blood-borne diseases.

In February 2023, we finally opened a low barrier, Navigation Center/Emergency Shelter with wrap around services and are working on a next phase for additional transition housing units. I cannot stress how difficult it has been to bring leadership, law enforcement and the community together on a shared path and plan, and still El Dorado County's response to homelessness is fragile. We must do everything we can to support a successful course forward.

We are in agreement with El Dorado County that harm reduction services and needle exchange programs in El Dorado County are working to sabotage and undermine our efforts. Local statistics show an increase in crime and drug related offenses directly related to syringe exchange programs and services, and several cases from the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office as documented below:

1. *Methamphetamine and Heroin Sales Case* – During a search warrant the subject was selling pre-loaded syringes with heroin. The syringes were being obtained from Sierra Harm reduction for free and sold pre-filled in the City of Placerville mostly to transients.
2. *Heroin Possession* – Two subjects arrested for possession of heroin, pre-loaded syringes, and injection kits from Sierra Harm Reduction. Both advised they purchased the syringes pre-loaded.

3. *Methamphetamine and Heroin Case* – During a probation search subject was found to be in possession of a large quantity of products with Sierra Harm Reduction labelling. Pre-loaded heroin and injection kits were prepared for sale using those products. Additionally, methamphetamine oil burner style pipes from Sierra Harm Reduction were located during the search.
4. *Overdose Death Investigation* – Subject died from a fentanyl overdose. Syringes, and smoking paraphernalia from Sierra Harm Reduction was found at the scene.
5. *Overdose Death Investigation* – Sierra Harm Reduction Supplies found at the overdose scene. “Tooter” pipe and foil from a Sierra Harm Reduction package were in the decedent’s vicinity. It appears the decedent used fentanyl with those supplies prior to or during the incident that resulted in the overdose death.
6. *DEA Arrest / Search Warrant* - In South Lake Tahoe, Tahoe Harm Reduction-a clean needle exchange and overdose prevention company, identifies as a non-profit that has received grant funds for its operation. During a search warrant the CEO & Director of Tahoe Harm Reduction, was arrested for possession for sale of a controlled substance and was indicted by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). During the search warrant service, the house yielded large quantities of fentanyl, cocaine and an illegal firearm. As of February 2023, Tahoe Harm Reduction, Inc. has reportedly received grant funds for its operations and the status of this non-profit is unknown as the CEO is in Federal Pre- Trial Custody.

We understand that the contract with Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition which authorizes them to operate in El Dorado County is up for renewal September 1, 2023, and the intent and purpose of this letter is to formally request that this contract not be renewed. We also request that no other Harm Reduction Services be authorized to operate in El Dorado County including the City of Placerville.

The City Council of the City of Placerville and the Placerville Police Department are working diligently with El Dorado County to address the health and safety of all members of our county. As mentioned, the new Navigation Center/Emergency Shelter with wrap-around services was authorized to address the growing problem with homeless encampments and the associated health and safety and fire danger challenges. It is a low barrier shelter, allowing us to meet and serve people where they are while giving them every opportunity to productively move out of homelessness. Furthermore, our Police Department has dedicated well trained officers to assist unhoused population and help link them to resources and referrals.

We understand that harm reduction service operators are sometimes the only connection with the unhoused population in rural areas, and that they build relationships and are there to offer additional resources when people are receptive. In the City of Placerville and El Dorado County, we have already built an effective network of trusted relationships with the unhoused population. While we understand the intent of the syringe exchange program, our community is vehemently opposed to activities which enable illicit drug use, as evidenced by data from the El Dorado County Sheriff’s office. This goes against everything we are trying to address at a local level.

We thank you in advance for supporting local decisions based on local data. The City of Placerville, including the Placerville Police Department, respectfully but emphatically, asks that you do not

reauthorize syringe exchange programs in El Dorado County, including the City of Placerville as we work diligently to ensure and promote public health and safety in our county.

Respectfully,

Mayor Michael Saragosa
City of Placerville

Joseph Wren, Chief of Police
City of Placerville