



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
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State Health Director

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Thelma Wright, Co-Chair
North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition
1617 Guilford College Road
Jamestown, NC 27282-9383

Dear Ms. Wright,

Thank you for your recent letter. I want to take this opportunity to thank you and the North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition for continuing to educate our public health experts and the community about the merits of harm reduction. North Carolinians need your on-going leadership on this subject and we need your continued advocacy in supporting prevention strategies that have proven to work in other states such as clean syringe exchange.

As you know, this past legislative session I was in full support of House Bill 411 which would have permitted clean syringe exchange programs in select sites in our state like Guilford County. I continue to believe that clean syringe exchange in other states has demonstrated that access to sterile syringes and needles can reduce the number of new HIV infections, as well as infection from other blood born pathogens (e.g. Hepatitis B and C), by reducing the sharing of dirty syringes and needles among injecting drug users (IDUs). I believe clean syringe programs could not only work in our state to reduce disease but would also decrease the use of injectable drugs among drug users or the general community because we would be able to refer hard to reach drug users into counseling and drug treatment.

In addition, there is good antidotal evidence that access to clean syringes and needles would also contribute to the reduction in the number of accidental needle sticks among law enforcement officers and other "1st" responders, as well as among children that might find discarded syringes and needles on the streets and in parks.

In May 2005, I wrote a letter to Commissioner Davis, Guilford County Board of Commissioners, asking the Board of County Commissioners and the Board of Mental Health in Guilford County to follow the Guilford County Board of Health's action to support clean syringe exchange in Guilford County. I still consider Guilford County to be on the forefront of innovative public health work dedicated to improving community health.

I know that you and the North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition is also dedicated to providing innovative and bold public health leadership. I look forward to working with you in the future and appreciate all you do to improve the health of North Carolinians.

Sincerely,

Leah Devlin, DDS, MPH
State Health Director



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