

PHILIP B. SCOTT
GOVERNOR



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

May 19, 2022

The Honorable BetsyAnn Wrask
Clerk of the Vermont House of Representatives
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Ms. Wrask:

Pursuant to Chapter II, Section 11 of the Vermont Constitution, I am returning H. 505, *An act relating to the creation of the Drug Use Standards Advisory Board within the Vermont Sentencing Commission*, without my signature.

Vermont has made progress in treating drug and alcohol addiction as an illness, de-stigmatizing, expanding treatment, and instituting recovery systems that enable individuals to re-build their lives. This year, I proposed, and the Legislature passed, significant investments in these areas because this continues to be a priority issue, especially as we experience an alarming increase in the number of overdose deaths and deaths by suicide.

I agree that the criminal justice system cannot, and should not, be the only tool in this work – and in Vermont, it is not. However, we cannot completely abandon reasonable regulation and law enforcement as a tool.

Specifically, this bill creates a Drug Use Standards Advisory Board with a stated goal to identify a path to effectively legalize personal possession and use of dangerous and highly addictive drugs, stating:

“The primary objective of the Board shall be to determine, for each regulated and unregulated drug, the benchmark personal use dosage and the benchmark personal use supply. The benchmarks determined pursuant to this subsection shall be determined with a goal of preventing and reducing the criminalization of personal drug use.”

It places no limits on which drugs can be contemplated for legalization or the amounts, and while rightly saying we need to view substance abuse as a public health matter – a point where I agree – it includes absolutely no recognition of the often-disastrous health and safety impacts of using drugs like fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, and more. Nor does it acknowledge the role of enforcement in tracking down and stopping the dealers who seek to poison Vermonters – including children – for profit.

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In its written testimony, the Department of Public Safety expressed its concern that Vermont remains a “destination for drug trafficking” due in part to demand, and in part because of the view by drug traffickers that “the financial incentives outweigh the risks posed by Vermont’s criminal laws.”

For these reasons, I cannot allow H. 505 to go into law, and must return it without my signature pursuant to Chapter II, Section 11 of the Vermont Constitution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip B. Scott", written over a horizontal line.

Philip B. Scott
Governor

PBS/kp