

PHILIP B. SCOTT
GOVERNOR



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

June 7, 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.728, *An act relating to opioid overdose response services*, without my signature because it directs the Administration to design a plan for the implementation of one or more overdose prevention sites (also known as “safe injection sites”). From my standpoint, it seems counterintuitive to divert resources from proven harm reduction strategies to plan injection sites without clear data on the effectiveness of this approach.

We are all aware the pandemic has had negative impacts on the mental health of Vermonters. This includes concerning increases in drug and alcohol addiction, overdose deaths and suicides.

Prior to the pandemic, Vermont was making progress treating opioid addiction with our groundbreaking “hub-and-spoke” treatment system and medically assisted treatment of our corrections populations.

We also utilize harm reduction strategies, including syringe programs, distribution of Narcan, fentanyl test strips and comprehensive community education. These are proven, evidence-based approaches to saving lives but we must also continue to focus on preventing addiction in the first place and supporting people through treatment and recovery.

Unfortunately, this bill proposes to shift state policy and financial resources away from prevention and toward unproven strategies such as overdose prevention sites. It’s important to note that what little data exists on this approach is for sites located in large cities, so it’s not applicable to the vast majority of Vermont. Last year, I signed the experimental decriminalization of buprenorphine and am now waiting for the data to show if this had a positive impact on addiction or overdose rates in our state. I believe it’s important to analyze this data before moving to another experimental strategy.

For these reasons, I cannot allow H.728 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", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Philip B. Scott
Governor