



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
of BRITISH COLUMBIA



**Elenore Sturko, MLA**  
Surrey South

(via email)

January 30, 2024

Dear Minister Saks & Premier Eby,

I write to you today in my roles as both Member of the Legislative Assembly for Surrey South and Critic for Mental Health and Addiction to discuss two critical issues impacting British Columbia's drug overdose emergency.

First, I want to raise the issue of unwitnessed "safe supply" programs. I am aware of a letter sent to you on January 26, 2024, from top addictions and mental health professionals calling for the end of funding to unwitnessed "safe supply" programs. I fully support their position and their arguments.

One of the main concerns that I share with these professionals is the issue of diversion. Diversion poses a serious risk to the public's health and safety, as these drugs are potent opioids that can cause addiction, overdose, and death. While diversion of pharmaceuticals has existed for a long time, the risk mitigation guidelines implemented in our province during the COVID-19 pandemic appear to have significantly exacerbated this problem. Numerous addictions specialists have informed me that they are observing the onset of new opioid use disorders, particularly in youth, where the user entered the pathway of addiction through diverted drugs, included "safe supply" hydromorphone.

I want to acknowledge that pharmaceuticals have a role to play in the stabilization and titration of people with substance use disorder onto prescribed treatments. However, currently there are no safeguards in place to prevent diversion, nor is the government of British Columbia adequately investigating the effect of "safe supply" on the community.

Harm reduction plays an important role in saving lives. However, it is time that we expand the definition beyond the individual to include reduction of harm to the greater community. By stipulating that "safe supply" programs must be witnessed, we come closer to achieving this and provide a greatly needed guardrail.

SUAP funding for many "safe supply" programs in British Columbia is set to expire on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024. I respectfully request that any new funding of "safe supply" programs be contingent upon witnessed consumption and recovery-focused programming.

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Second, I wish to respectfully request the immediate end to the decriminalization pilot in British Columbia. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, Minister Carolyn Bennett pledged that if public health and safety outcomes were not met, the federal government would end the decriminalization pilot. As I am sure you are aware, British Columbia has reached a new grim milestone in the number of overdose deaths with 2511 lives lost in 2023. This tragic year over year increase signals that decriminalization is having no impact on saving lives. No evidence has been presented to prove there has been any improvement to public health indicators.

In September of 2023, following a large outcry from the public regarding the normalization of drug use in parks, playgrounds and other public spaces, the government of British Columbia and the federal government were forced to amend the letter of agreement for the pilot program regarding the areas no longer under exemption to the CDSA. This amendment did not alleviate the issue of public use in playgrounds. Nothing short of an end to the pilot program can adequately address this issue.

I hope that you will take my concerns seriously and act swiftly. I believe that this is the only way to protect our communities, especially our children and youth, from the devastating effects of the opioid crisis. I am happy to discuss this important issue further and can be reached at 604-541-4556 or [Elenore.Sturko.MLA@leg.bc.ca](mailto:Elenore.Sturko.MLA@leg.bc.ca)

Sincerely,



MLA Elenore Sturko  
BC United Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Addiction, Recovery & Education  
Surrey South

cc: MP Laila Goodridge, Shadow Minister for Addictions