

Safehouse

A public health approach to overdose prevention in Philadelphia

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William M. McSwain
U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney
Eastern District of Pennsylvania
615 Chestnut Street
Suite 1250
Philadelphia, PA 19106-4476

Dear U.S. Attorney McSwain:

Thank you for letter of November 9 and the invitation to continue the dialogue about our efforts to provide overdose prevention services. We are grateful for a Department of Justice that embraces the need to combat the scourge of opioid abuse.

To ensure candor in our ongoing dialogue, we would like to share our thoughts about this initiative.

We respectfully disagree with the conclusion that Safehouse's proposed consumption room would violate federal law. The legislative intent of Title 21, United States Code, Section 856 is to prohibit individuals from knowingly allowing their property to be used for the purpose of distributing or using drugs for profit. We believe that a proper and constitutional application of Section 856 does not prohibit our primary purpose of preventing fatal overdoses.

Overdose prevention is part of a multifaceted public health approach to combating the opioid crisis. Extensive research has demonstrated the benefits of overdose prevention services for people who use drugs and the communities where drug use occurs. For more on the services to be offered, please see safehousephilly.org.

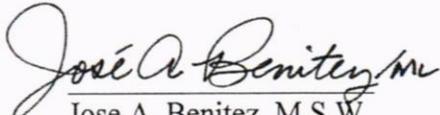
Moreover, the leaders and organizers of Safehouse are motivated by the Judeo-Christian beliefs ingrained in us from our religious schooling, our devout families and our practices of worship. At the core of our faith is the principle that preservation of human life overrides any other considerations. As witnesses to great losses of life in our community, we are compelled by our religious beliefs to take action to save lives.

Finally, we hope that the U.S. Attorney's office will exercise prosecutorial discretion in assessing our proposed overdose prevention services. This is not a request that your office approve or ignore Safehouse's proposed consumption room, but rather that the

same discretion in prosecution, that is shown in a range of activities that may be considered unlawful, be exercised here.

We welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss our shared goals of fighting this epidemic.

Respectfully,


Jose A. Benitez, M.S.W.


Ronda B. Goldfein, Esq.