

January 8, 2024

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

The 111 undersigned organizations write to express our strong disappointment with your letter to the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board rejecting their recommendation to use funds to support an Overdose Prevention Center (OPC) demonstration project.

We were encouraged by your early attention to the overdose crisis. And yet, since you assumed office, over 13,000 New Yorkers have died from a preventable overdose, with deaths continuing to trend upward, setting new and more devastating records each year.¹ We are in an unprecedented public health crisis that is compounded by a lack of accessible housing, barriers to healthcare, and structural racism. Black New Yorkers have the highest rate of overdose death and the largest increase from 2021 to 2022, with Latino/e New Yorkers having the second highest overdose death increase.²

These numbers are unacceptable and would be higher without the lifesaving and life affirming work of New York's two OPCs, operated by OnPoint NYC. In two years, these sites have intervened in potentially fatal overdoses more than 1,200 times³ and have been instrumental in connecting people to housing, detox, counseling, and other holistic services. In addition, the OPCs have diverted more than two million units of syringe litter and other hazardous waste away from streets, parks and buildings.

The Advisory Board included their recommendation to fund OPC demonstration projects again in 2023 understanding that OPCs are currently one of the critical ventures actively working to prevent the deaths of Black and brown New Yorkers. Right now, the only OPCs in the country are in New York City, and so the Advisory Board made their recommendation recognizing that communities outside of New York City deserve the opportunity to benefit from the range of services provided by OPCs. The recommendation was intentionally designed to allow the state of New York to conduct an academic study of OPCs, something the federal government itself is already doing.

By omitting the legal analysis used to make the decision to reject the Advisory Board's proposal, the Executive does not take seriously the enormity of the overdose crisis and the need to address it with bold strategies. It also ignores that New York's OPCs have operated for two years without federal interference and Rhode Island has authorized state funding to open an OPC. We are living through an immense public health crisis and New Yorkers deserve an explanation when a program that is proven to be life-saving and life-affirming is rejected.

¹ Center for Disease Control, Drug Overdose Mortality by State, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/drug_poisoning_mortality/drug_poisoning.htm

² NYC Department of Health, *Epi Data Brief: Unintentional Drug Poisoning (Overdose) Deaths in New York City in 2022*, Sept. 2023, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/databrief137.pdf>

³ OnPoint NYC, <https://onpointnyc.org/>

Strategies to address the overdose epidemic must be robust, anti-racist, and responsive to New Yorkers who are chronically underserved and increasingly at-risk of adverse life and health outcomes as they age. Safe and supportive spaces to prevent overdose death must be available and promoted throughout the entire state as diligently as other crucial public health programs such as cooling centers on hot days or vaccines.

As people continue to lose their lives and families continue to bury their loved ones at astounding rates, there is a real opportunity for the state to be a national leader in implementing a bold vision for addressing this epidemic. The Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board has attempted to do just that with their 2023 report. It is time for you, Governor Hochul, to do the same.

Signed,

AAS Empowerment LLC
Access/Research Coalition
ACR Health
Action for a Better Community, Rochester
Addiction Center of Broome County
African Services Committee
AIDS Advisory Council
AIDS Center of Queens County
Albany Damien Center
Alliance for Positive Change
Alliance for Positive Health
Amida Care
AREA
Argus Community
Bedford Stuyvesant Family Health Center
Black Health (National Black Leadership Commission on Health)
BOOM! Health
Bridging Access to Care, Inc.
Bronx Móvil
Bronx Works
Brooklyn Community Pride Center
Brooklyn Defender Services
Brooklyn Movement Center
Buffalo Resilience
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
Camelot of Staten Island Inc.
CASES
Center for Community Alternatives
Central New York HIV Care Network
Central Region Addiction Resource Center
Circle for Support

Citizen Action of New York
Coalition of Homeless Youth
Coalition of Medication Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates (COMPA)
Committee of Interns and Residents SEIU
Community Access
Community Action for Social Justice
Community Health Action of Staten Island
Community Service Society
Destination Tomorrow
Diaspora Community Health Center
Drug Policy Alliance
Ellis Medicine
Elmcor
Empowerment: Before, During and After
End the New Jim Crow Action Network (ENJAN)
EngageWell IPA, LLC
Equitable Future, Inc.
Evergreen Health
Exponents
Faith in Harm Reduction
Family Services Network of New York
Friends of Recovery NY
From Punishment to Public Health at John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Gay Men's Health Crisis
God's Love We Deliver
Grand Street Settlement
Haitian American Community Coalition, Inc.
Harlem United
Harm Reduction Coalition
Hispanic Federation
Hispanic Health Network
Hospitality House TC, Inc.
Housing Works
iHealth
In Our Own Voices, Inc.
InUnity Alliance
Invest In Our New York
Iris House
Justice Committee
Latino Commission on AIDS (LCOA)
Legal Action Center
Legal Aid Society
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center (The Center)
Long Island Social Justice Action Network (LISJAN)

ME Action
Michael Galipeau Consulting
National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, Inc. (NAMI-NYC)
National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (NBLCA)
National Survivors Union
National Working Positive Coalition
New Hour
NEW Pride Agenda
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York Doctors Coalition
New York Recovery Alliance
New York Harm Reduction Association
New York State Council for Community Behavioral Health
NEXT Distro
NYC Justice Peer Initiative
OnPoint NYC
P.A.I.N
Peer Network of New York
Project Safe Point- Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services
Recovery All Way (RAW)
REACH Medical
Rochester Area Task Force on AIDS
Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center
Southern Tier AIDS Program
St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction
Strong Economy For All Coalition
The Bronx Defenders
The Fortune Society
The Osborne Society
Translatina Network
Treatment Action Group (TAG)
Trillium Health
Truth Pharm
VOCAL - NY
Warren Washington County Homeless Youth Coalition
Youth Represent

cc:

Majority Leader Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Speaker Assemblymember Carl Heastie