

# Harm Reduction Commission

Meeting Minutes  
November 20, 2018  
3:00-5:00 pm

---

Date of meeting: Tuesday, November 20, 2018

Start time: 3:05 pm

End time: 5:00 pm

Location: McCormack Building, Conference Rooms 2 & 3, One Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108

Members present:

- Marylou Sudders – Executive Office of Health and Human Services (Chair)
- Monica Bharel, MD, MPH – Department of Public Health
- Jeffrey N. Roy – State Representative
- Cindy Friedman – State Senator
- Marty Martinez – Designee of the Mayor of Boston
- Marc McGovern – Mayor of Cambridge
- Jessie M. Gaeta, MD – Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program
- Matilde Castiel, MD – Worcester Health and Human Services
- Robert Roose, MD – Mercy Medical Center
- Armando Gonzalez – Massachusetts resident
- Aubri Esters – Massachusetts resident
- Deirdre Calvert, LICSW – Column Health
- Gary Langis – Education Development Center
- Frederick Ryan – Arlington Police Department

Members participating remotely:

- Leo Beletsky, JD, MPH – Northeastern University

## **Proceedings**

Secretary Sudders called the meeting to order at 3:05 pm. She provided an overview of the remote participation procedures, including the need for all votes to be conducted via roll call.

**Vote:** The Secretary called for a vote to approve the minutes from the previous meeting on October 24, 2018, which was seconded and approved unanimously by roll-call vote (all members present voted in the affirmative; Professor Beletsky indicated his vote in the affirmative over the phone).

Secretary Sudders reviewed the updated schedule and agenda for the commission's next meetings.

Commissioner Bharel provided an overview of harm reduction efforts in Massachusetts (see PowerPoint presentation posted online to the commission's meeting materials webpage for additional details). She noted that no universal definitions of harm reduction exist, but that the term incorporates a spectrum of strategies based on particular needs of communities. She highlighted two existing programs operating in Massachusetts: the Department of Public Health (DPH) Syringe Services Programs (SSPs) and the DPH Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution (OEND) program. In response to a question from the commission, Commissioner Bharel explained that each municipality serviced by mobile syringe exchange service programs in Massachusetts needed to approve the services in their town. She noted that while SSPs receive funding from DPH, the majority are operated in partnership with DPH by various organizations and human service programs. Commissioner Bharel

also provided an overview of research into the efficacy of SSPs, highlighting a CDC report (available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/risk/cdchiv-fs-syringe-services.pdf>).

Mayor McGovern provided a brief overview of a pilot program the City of Cambridge is exploring, which could potentially create a network of boxes throughout the city where Narcan would be available in case of emergency. Mayor McGovern noted that the details are forthcoming.

Dr. Gaeta presented a detailed overview of the Supportive Place for Observation and Treatment (SPOT) program run by the Boston Health Care for the Homeless program (see PowerPoint presentation posted online to the commission's meeting materials webpage for additional details). Dr. Gaeta explained that the SPOT is a low-threshold clinic located in an area in downtown Boston where there is a high concentration of opioid users. She noted that the goal of the SPOT program is to prevent overdose deaths, more effectively connect high-risk individuals with treatment, and reduce the negative stigma associated with substance use. Dr. Gaeta highlighted user data for the SPOT, which over a two-year period (April 2016-2018) registered 7,100 visits from over 600 individuals, 34% of whom were female.

Devin Larkin, Director of the Bureau of Recovery Services for the Boston Public Health Commission, presented on the City of Boston's Engagement Center (see PowerPoint presentation posted online to the commission's meeting materials webpage for additional details). Director Larkin noted that the Engagement Center opened in August 2017 in response to needs expressed by individuals living on the street, community agencies, and businesses for a safe place for people struggling with substance use and homelessness to go during daytime hours. She noted that the Engagement Center is co-located with the Addicts Health Opportunity Prevention Education (AHOPE) program in downtown Boston and is utilized by an average of 300 clients each day.

Mr. Martinez noted that from the City of Boston's perspective, the Engagement Center speaks to the quality of life issues in the neighborhood and has served an important role for clients. He added that the city is exploring more permanent solutions for the Engagement Center.

Mayor McGovern noted that the City of Cambridge opened a night center last year. He explained that the center operates seasonally, from December until mid-April, and provides safe, overnight shelter for residents. Commissioner Castiel noted that there are similar centers in Worcester that are operated by faith-based groups.

Secretary Sudders reviewed the timeline for the commission's remaining three meetings and requested feedback from the members for presenters for the commission's upcoming meetings. Commissioner Castiel, Mr. Langis and Representative Roy noted their preferences for additional speakers on safe or supervised injection facilities, potentially from those operating in Canada. Senator Friedman requested an earlier discussion of the legal barriers to operating a harm reduction site. Ms. Esters highlighted the recently released legal memorandum from Ropes & Gray LLP, and requested that the commission hear from residents who would use a harm reduction site in Massachusetts.

Mr. Martinez proposed that it would be helpful if commission members could forward questions about harm reduction approaches and safe/supervised injection facilities to the Secretary's staff. Secretary Sudders noted that her staff will reach out to members with a request for their questions and additional information needed.

**Note:** The Secretary called for a vote for the meeting to adjourn, which was seconded and approved unanimously by roll-call vote (all members present voted in the affirmative; Professor Beletsky indicated his vote in the affirmative over the phone).

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 pm.