

COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS PROPOSES FIVE-POINT PLAN TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN PHILADELPHIA

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PHILADELPHIA – February 14 – Councilwoman Cindy Bass (8th District) today proposed a five-point plan to address substance abuse while also addressing the historical disparities regarding the treatment of drug users in response to the proposal put forth by the Mayor’s Opioid Task Force to open a safe injection site in Philadelphia.

“As Chair of the City Council Committee on Public Health and Human Services, I was not informed of the Task Force’s plans to support a safe injection site in Philadelphia ahead of their public announcement. However, I’ve long been thinking about the opioid crisis and the crisis-level use of other drugs that have cost so many lives in Philadelphia,” Councilwoman Bass said. “This new willingness to address opioid overdose deaths through the establishment of safe injection sites also opens up the opportunity for a much larger and long overdue conversation that acknowledges the disparities with which we have historically recognized and

treated substance abuse. We must jump in front of perpetuating any inequalities in drug treatment.”

From conversations with concerned community members, Bass created a road map to address the crisis of substance abuse in the City of Philadelphia. In summary, the plan advocates that:

1. The City of Philadelphia should invest in long-standing, trusted, community-based drug addiction treatment facilities. These facilities have been working on-the-ground for years, many with volunteer staff. As part of this investment, the City should encourage the hiring of citizens in recovery to counsel those currently in the throes of addiction.
2. The City of Philadelphia should require the Philadelphia medical examiner to perform toxicology reports and to track data identifying specific drugs linked to fatal overdoses. This would aid the City in targeting specific drugs found to particularly contribute to overdose deaths in an effort to reduce fatalities.
3. The City of Philadelphia should launch community-based drug prevention and education campaigns in all schools, recreation centers, libraries and other city-supported programs. The campaigns should provide resources to refer community members to drug treatment facilities in their own neighborhoods, and inform residents on what to do when faced with various drug-related scenarios.
4. The City of Philadelphia should, in addition to the City’s suit against several major pharmaceutical companies, create a monitoring system that tracks doctors associated with over-prescribing opioids and work with doctors to establish a protocol for prescribing opioids. The City should consult professionals at the University of Pennsylvania, who saw prescriptions for smaller amounts of opioids increase after creating a system designed to help combat the opioid crisis.
5. The City of Philadelphia should investigate exonerating misdemeanor drug convictions and help guide these individuals into treatment; investigate clearing records of those convicted of certain drug felonies who have not been convicted of a crime in a certain number of years and; investigate on a case-by-case basis clearing records of those convicted of prostitution and similar crimes where drug addiction was involved.

Councilwoman Bass will meet with neighborhood-based drug treatment advocates and visit drug treatment centers to help facilitate strategies to combat the substance abuse crisis.

“I have good relationships with drug treatment providers in my district. Working with them is not new,” Bass said. “But the conversation about safe injection sites is new and it requires us to do a much deeper dive into how to bolster already-existing programs in a way that saves lives and protects community members.

“I’m encouraged that the City is looking for innovative ways to address the life-threatening health crisis of drug addiction,” Councilwoman Bass said. “We know that people of color are so often left behind as our nation innovates and moves forward. We can’t allow this to happen in 2018 or ever again, especially during this substance abuse epidemic when lives are at stake.”

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Councilwoman Cindy Bass represents the 8th Council District, which includes Germantown, Mt. Airy, Nicetown, Tioga, Chestnut Hill, portions of Logan, and West Oak Lane. She is Chair of Council’s committees on Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs and Public Health and Human Services.