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BC SOCIAL WORKERS URGE GOVERNMENT TO WITHDRAW LEGISLATION RESTRICTING DRUG USE IN PUBLIC SPACES

(Vancouver) BC's professional social work association is expressing grave concerns regarding recently introduced legislation that aims to restrict people from using illicit drugs in most public places. The BC Association of Social Workers (BCASW) urges Premier David Eby and Public Safety Minister Mike Farnworth to withdraw Bill 34.

"The proposed legislation is evidence that the BC government is backing away from its three-year commitment to decriminalize personal drug possession and shying away from the harm reduction strategy and services it committed to developing" said BCASW President Michael Crawford. "The BC government's half-measure on decriminalization has been inadequate and has not stemmed the tide of deaths due to the poisoned illicit drug supply and now this legislation hits the most vulnerable hard again."

In June 2022, the BCASW cautioned the BC government that their decriminalization plan was insufficient and called the plan performative. The personal exemption of 2.5 grams of illicit substances was criticized by many professional and user groups as too low and the absence of a plan to create more safe consumption sites, and dramatically expand safe supply was thought by many to ensure that the plan would fail.

"This legislation effectively re-criminalizes drug users by giving police the power to arrest those who do not comply with the space restrictions", said Crawford. "The power given to police to confiscate drugs from persons using in restricted spaces is unnecessarily punitive and will result in undue hardship as users will be forced to find additional funds and make extra drug buys, increasing the risk of purchasing poison-laced drugs."

The BCASW is concerned that the legislation puts more lives at risk. The restricted space provisions leave little public space for drug use and will force users inside where they may use alone with increased risk.

“We would like to see the province significantly increase the number of safe injection and inhalation sites and move forward quickly to deliver a secure and safe supply of drugs to users”, said Crawford. “Premier Eby and Minister Farnworth have made a politically expedient decision rather than rely on evidence to fully develop a robust response to the crisis based on harm reduction.”

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The BC Association of Social Workers is a voluntary, not-for-profit membership association that supports and promotes the profession of social work and advocates for social justice. BCASW is one of the provincial/territorial social work associations in partnership with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW). Through CASW we support the work of the International Federation of Social Workers. BCASW was incorporated in 1956 and has branches and members (including students) throughout BC.

BCASW acknowledge that we work in the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and that our members and colleagues live, work, and play in unceded territories across British Columbia. We appreciate and acknowledge Métis and Inuit peoples across British Columbia.