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My name is Kelly Cookson. I have worked in the field of addiction services for over 6 years, am the parent of a child in long term recovery, and a person who initially did not agree with many harm reduction practices. It was my belief that syringe exchange and other harm reduction programs were “enabling”. In the past I would have had very strong feelings of opposition to a LD1159. I would have had many preconceived notions and uninformed opinions. It wasn't until I researched the data and had people explain harm reduction in a way I could understand that I not only have changed my personal thoughts on it, I have become an advocate of programs to help persons who use drugs.

Harm Reduction Health Care Centers are not something new, only new to the United States. The evidence of the benefits of having these centers speak through the data. There have been NO RECORDED DEATHS in any of the over 120 supervised injection facilities worldwide. None. People WILL use drugs regardless of whether or not these centers exist. People WILL die without these centers as the data is proving as overdose deaths rise state and nationwide at alarming rates.

I had an ignorant, honestly embarrassing, preconceived notion of what these programs look like. I had pictured a crowded room with people injecting drugs on dirty couches and someone walking around giving naloxone as needed. I was very wrong. These are medical facilities with medical professionals. People bring in the substance they plan to use and are offered clean supplies, fentanyl test strips and other harm reduction tools with a professional to help them stay as safe as possible. These professionals are also available to assist people who want to connect with recovery resources such as detox and rehabilitation facilities. Many people who use drugs are not accustomed to being treated with respect and compassion, and when they are this not only builds a trusting relationship with staff but also helps to improve the negative emotional and physical impacts drug use has on individuals such as shame, isolation, diseases and death. As long as there is breath there is hope, and that is what these facilities do; they keep people alive and free of as many harmful effects of drug use as possible so they have an opportunity to recover if they choose to.

It is time to open our minds and think outside of the box for solutions to the overdose crisis in our nation that has lowered the overall life expectancy of Americans. It is estimated that 300 Americans A DAY are losing their lives to drug overdoses. WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DOING ISN'T HELPING, it's getting worse every year. We need to act now.