

## **First supervised drug injection site in U.S. offered lease in Philadelphia's Kensington district**

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March 21, 2019

Safehouse, the nonprofit founded to open a supervised injection site in Philadelphia, is in negotiations to sign a lease on a property in Kensington, representatives from the organization said Thursday.

Ronda Goldfein, the vice president of Safehouse's board, said the group is in talks to sign a lease for a "nominal" fee on a property on Hilton Street near the Allegheny Avenue stop on the Market-Frankford Line. The Robert Nicoletti Family Trust, which owns several properties in the block, plans to donate the space to Safehouse, rent-free, said a source with knowledge of the negotiations. The Nicoletti family owns Philadelphia Suburban Development Corporation, a major developer in the region.

Safehouse had considered more than 25 locations around the city, Goldfein said, but the Hilton Street property was the front-runner because it is convenient to many people in addiction who use the Market-Frankford El to get to Kensington, which long has been the center of Philadelphia's opioid crisis. It also is in a commercial corridor, not residential areas. Ultimately, Safehouse intends to open more sites in the city, Goldfein said.

The move brings Safehouse a big step closer to opening what would be the first supervised injection facility in the nation. It comes just over a month after the U.S. Attorney's Office in Philadelphia filed a lawsuit asking a judge to rule on the legality of Safehouse's plans to open a site where people in addiction can use drugs, access medical care and drug treatment, and be revived by medical personnel if they overdose. The group still is raising money to operate a site, but hopes to open in 2019, Goldfein said.

Former Gov. Ed Rendell said at a conference Thursday at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. Thursday that Safehouse had been offered the Kensington property by an owner who wished to remain anonymous, but who had lost a son to an overdose recently. He called the building "beautiful" and said Safehouse had considered other locations, but that the Kensington property under negotiation was his favorite.

Neighbors in the area have been notified of the lease negotiations, Safehouse officials said.

"The neighbors are a crucial player in this conversation," said Goldfein, who is married to Inquirer editor David Lee Preston. "We're not asking them to approve it -- though that would be great -- as much as we want to be able to give them all the information we have and have an ongoing discussion with them, so they will be as comfortable as they can be with the facility."

Rendell said he was prepared to go to prison to defend Safehouse in opening what he called a crucial, life-saving measure in a city that saw 1,217 overdose deaths in 2017 and an estimated 1,100 fatal overdoses last year. He added he said as much during a recent lunch with William McSwain, the U.S. attorney who filed the lawsuit against Safehouse and has decried the effort as illegal.

“We are bound and determined to go ahead,” Rendell said Thursday.