



Doctor: Repeal the 'crack house statute' and legalize safe injection sites

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WASHINGTON (TND) — The Biden administration came under fire this week over a federal grant the Department of Health and Human Services announced in December would provide drug “harm reduction” tools.

\$30 million in grants for harm reduction programs aims to reduce the personal and public health effects of drug use, and include the distribution of “safe smoking kits.” Republican lawmakers criticized the Biden administration for using federal money to distribute crack pipes to drug users; the grants themselves do not specifically mention crack pipes.

“No federal funding will be used directly or through subsequent reimbursement of grantees to put pipes in safe smoking kits. The goal of harm reduction is to save lives. The administration is focused on a comprehensive strategy to stop the spread of drugs and curb addiction,” HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra and White House Drug Policy Advisor Rahul Gupta said in a letter.

Dr. Jeffrey Singer said the most important thing both federal and state governments can do to implement harm reduction measures, is to “get out of the way of harm reduction organizations that want to save people’s lives.”

“The 'crack house statute' was created in the 80s; that prevents privately-funded organizations like the one in Philadelphia from setting up safe injection sites, and also federal law makes it very difficult for doctors who want to treat patients with addiction with methadone or buprenorphine, also called Suboxone, because it is so severely restricted,” said Dr. Singer to The National Desk’s Jan Jeffcoat. “On a state level, drug paraphernalia has made it difficult for private groups to operate needle exchange programs or even handout fentanyl test strips which can save lives dramatically.”

The Justice Department said Thursday they are now “evaluating” the concept of safe injection sites and discussing “appropriate guardrails.”

“They've been in use in most of Europe. There are 38 of them in Canada now, in Australia since the late 1980s. They've been proven to save lives, to stop the spread of disease. And as a bonus, they bring a lot of people into rehab, and they take people off the streets,” said Dr. Singer.

But safe injection sites remain illegal on a federal level, due to the "crack house statute." Singer said while he's glad the current Justice Department is rethinking safe injection sites, it's not a guarantee for change.

“The best thing to do is for Congress to repeal the ‘crack house statute,’” said Singer.