

November 11, 2020

CL 20-2020, October 22, 2020
PHSSC 9-2020, October 13, 2020
PHD-C 9-2020, October 13, 2020

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RE: PHD-C 9-2020

Referral of Motion – Decriminalization of Personal Possession of Illicit Drugs

Regional Council, at its meeting held on October 22, 2020, passed the following recommendation of its Public Health and Social Services Committee:

WHEREAS governments around the world are considering different approaches to drugs, including the decriminalization of drug use and possession and legal regulation;

WHEREAS a growing number of health officials and boards of health throughout Ontario, Canada, and around the world are calling for changes to our approach to drugs, especially in the midst of the opioid crisis and COVID-19 pandemic, in which the contaminated, unregulated supply of illegal drugs is the main contributor to the crisis;

WHEREAS, in July 2020, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police released a report recognizing substance use disorder as a public health issue and agree that evidence, supported by numerous Canadian health leaders, suggests that decriminalization for simple possession is an effective way to reduce the public health and public safety harms associated with substance use;

WHEREAS the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police endorse alternatives to criminal sanctions for simple possession of illicit drugs, and agree that increased community capacity and resources are necessary to support the availability and integration of health, social programs, and enforcement required for effective diversion;

WHEREAS the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police agree that police services remain committed to combatting organized crime and disrupting the supply of harmful substances coming into our communities by targeting drug trafficking and illegal production and importation, and further agree that diversion provides new opportunities to make positive impacts in communities. These impacts may include reducing recidivism, reducing ancillary crimes and improving health and safety outcomes for individuals who use drugs;

WHEREAS laws that criminalize people simply for using and possessing drugs have resulted in serious health and social harms, including forcing people into unsafe spaces and high-risk behaviours leading to HIV and HCV infection, resulting in criminal records that make it difficult to obtain employment and housing, and reinforcing negative stereotypes and judgements about people who use drugs;

WHEREAS some groups are more impacted by our drug laws than others, including people who are homeless and/or living in poverty, people with mental health and substance use issues, people from racialized groups, Indigenous people, women, and youth;

WHEREAS a public health approach to drugs would be based on principles and strategies that have been shown to support healthy individuals, families, and communities;

WHEREAS countries that have decriminalized personal drug use and possession and invested in public health interventions have seen results, including decreases in HIV and overdose, decreases in costs to the criminal justice system, and improved police/community relationships;

WHEREAS the evidence on the health and social harms of our current criminalization approach to illegal drugs as well as that of alternative approaches such as decriminalization and legal regulation strongly support the need to shift to a public health approach to drugs in Canada;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

1. That the federal government **BE URGED** to convene a task force, comprised of people who use drugs, family members, and policy, research and program experts in the areas of public health, human rights, substance use, mental health,

and criminal justice, to explore options for the legal regulation of all drugs in Canada, based on a public health approach;

2. That the task force **BE URGED** to scale up prevention, harm reduction, and treatment services and to explore the decriminalization of the possession of all drugs for personal use; and

3. That this motion **BE CIRCULATED** to Minister of Health Patty Hajdu, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada David Lametti, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health Christine Elliott, Attorney General Doug Downey, Niagara's MPs and MPPs, Niagara's 12 local area municipalities, Niagara Regional Police Service, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and the Association of Local Public Health Agencies.

Yours truly,



Ann-Marie Norio
Regional Clerk

CLK-C 2020-204

Distribution List:

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