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The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, K1A 0A2

July 20, 2006

RE: Vancouver's Supervised Injection Facility

As an academic whose work focuses on the cultural heritage and survival of British Columbia's indigenous people, as a concerned citizen with many years of volunteer experience in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and as a current member of the Executive Board of the Portland Hotel Society, I am writing to urge you to extend the federal exemption for Vancouver's Supervised Injection Facility, which is up for renewal on September 12th 2006.

I know this is a difficult choice for you as a politician, particularly one with a mainly conservative constituency and convictions. But I also know that you take pride in making decisions that are both ethical and rational, and on both counts – the head and the heart – there is no doubt that this facility's permit should be renewed.

As a social experiment, the Supervised Injection Facility has been a resounding success. Since its inception, it has been subject to intense scrutiny from medical and law enforcement professionals, as well as from local businessmen and politicians, the media and the general public. There is almost total unanimity from these diverse perspectives that the facility has met its objectives – to decrease death, disease, crime and human misery in Canada's poorest neighbourhood. At the same time, it has saved government and social service agencies in terms of time, money, and human resources. There are no negative side effects.

As a specialist in aboriginal issues I should add that the facility is particularly important for Vancouver's large and growing urban native population. Urban natives have suffered from a double disruption: first, like all of Canada's indigenous people, they have been displaced from their traditional territories and way of life; and second, more often than not they have become alienated from their own communities. This means they are particularly vulnerable to a downward spiral of physical and mental illness, drug addiction, extreme poverty and crime. Facilities such as the Supervised Injection Facility, which stabilizes drug dependency and prevents infection, are vital in breaking that spiral, and providing a first step towards recovery for our most disadvantaged citizens.

Why, then, should there be any issue with respect to renewal of the exemption? The answer, as I am sure you know, is to be found in the context of the (largely unsuccessful) interdiction-based approach to drug problems which has dominated public policy south of the border. In that context, the success of Vancouver's approach is a threat to the vested interests of the endless

'War on Drugs'. There will doubtless be pressure on your government from those interests to shut the Supervised Injection Facility down, not in spite of its success but because of it. I therefore urge you, as a practical politician with a firm grasp of fiscal wisdom and public policy, and as the Prime Minister of an independent Canada, to resist those interests and to renew the federal exemption for the facility. Doing so will undoubtedly save lives; not doing so will equally surely lead to needless death from overdose and infection.

Yours,

Henry Davis, Ph.D
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