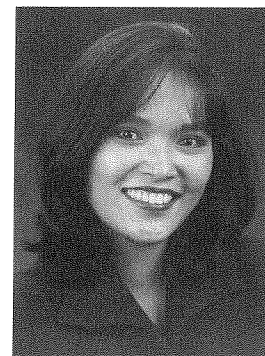


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**Province of
British Columbia**
Legislative Assembly



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19 July 2006

Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Re: InSite

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Vancouver Mt. Pleasant in British Columbia. Vancouver Mt. Pleasant is one of the most diverse communities in British Columbia. It encompasses distinct neighbourhoods that showcase the vibrant multi-cultural fabric of Canada. At the same time, Vancouver Mt. Pleasant also has one of the poorest neighbourhoods in all of Canada. We face many challenges in this community including the issue of substance addiction. Over the years, the community has struggled to find solutions to this deep seeded challenge while recognizing that there is no silver bullet to the problem. In this process, as the local MLA along and with the community, we have experienced grief and anguish at the tremendous loss of members in our community. I along with members of the business community and residents have been challenged with issues around public disorder, safety concerns amongst other things.

Over the years, we have learned and evolved from our experiences. It was not an easy process as different points of view prevailed. In learning and understanding the issue, I have come to accept the recognition that dead people don't detox and economically, our current approach to the problem was costing taxpayers significantly with little result. Research into the matter revealed that there were some successes in other jurisdictions where they have adopted a harm reduction approach to drug addiction. One such initiative was the establishment of supervised injection sites. In particular, evidence from other countries that supervised injection sites were helpful in reducing drug overdose deaths, curtailing the spread of disease (notably HIV infections and Hepatitis C which are readily



transmitted through needle sharing), assisting people to connect with detox and addiction treatment programs, and lowering the public nuisance that is associated with street drug use. As well, we also recognized that all levels of government needed to work together on this issue in a coordinated fashion.

In 2003, in my role as a Minister in the Provincial government of the day, I was one of the principals, along with representatives of the Federal Government and the City of Vancouver, in establishing the Vancouver Agreement. Key to the Vancouver Agreement is the development of a comprehensive substance misuse strategy. Some of the objectives of this strategy include:

- Decrease preventable deaths related to substance misuse
- Reduce incidence of communicable disease associated with injection drug use
- Reduce overall costs to the economy related to substance misuse
- Enhance prevention initiatives for all age groups
- Increase public awareness and education to reduce harm
- Promote rehabilitation options
- Reduce criminal activities associated with substance misuse
- Improve the health status of residents in the Downtown Eastside
- Reduce the need for emergency and crisis intervention

In spite of strong opposition from some sectors of our community, the three levels of government signed onto a comprehensive substance misuse strategy that included a harm reduction component. As we approach the third anniversary of the opening of InSite, independent observers and preliminary evaluations are documenting positive outcomes:

- InSite has been successfully integrated into the community and attracted a wide cross section of injection drug users averaging over 600 per day.
- InSite personnel have intervened in over 450 overdoses with no fatalities and initiated over 2000 referrals to counselling and other support services.
- InSite's nurses are providing care – including over 2000 interventions for abscesses.
- Use of InSite and contact with the facility's addictions counsellor were both independently associated with quicker entry into a detoxification program.
- InSite appears to have reduced syringe sharing.
- There have been improvements in public order, including reduced public injection drug use and public syringe disposal
- Individuals requiring help injecting, a risk factor associated with HIV incidence, are receiving safer injecting education at InSite



Three years later, the opposition to InSite has quietened and in fact, a number of those who were opposed to have changed their position and are now on record as supporting the continuance of InSite because of the positive results from the initiative.. At this juncture, it would be crucial that we work to build on the successes of this harm reduction initiative.

On 12 September 2006, the Health Canada exemption under section 56 of the *Controlled Substances Act* which allows InSite to offer a clean, safe and legal place for drug users to inject is up for renewal. I am writing to ask that your government make a strong commitment to renew this exemption.

I look forward to hearing of your Government's decision to extend the exemption under section 56 of the *Controlled Substances Act* and thank you for your immediate attention on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Jenny Wai Ching Kwan, MLA
Vancouver-Mt. Pleasant

cc: InSite for Community Safety