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The Rt Hon Suella Braverman, MP, Home Secretary
The Rt Hon Steve Barclay, MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Friday, 16th December 2022

RE: Organisations and Experts Call for Rethink of Drug Possession Proposals

Dear Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Health and Social Care,

We express our serious concerns over the proposals in The Home Office's 'Swift, Certain, Tough: New Consequences for Drug Possession' White Paper released in July 2022. The proposed extension of punitive policing targeting people who use drugs runs contrary to the overwhelming body of evidence and threatens to draw limited resources into policies likely to exacerbate a range of social and health harms.

The proposals focus on punishing 'so-called recreational users' who are not dependent on drugs. Targeting this large population will require a dramatic scaling up of policing, including the use of stop and search. Stop and searches for drugs already account for two-thirds of all searches, disproportionately impacting marginalised and ethnic minority communities, particularly Black people. These proposals will further undermine trust in law enforcement and already-strained community police relations.

The Home Office's own research has stated that the £1.6 billion a year spent on drug law enforcement has little impact on drug availability. Home Office research has also concluded there are no clear links between intensity of punitive enforcement and levels of use. But punishment and criminalisation of people who use drugs has repeatedly been shown to undermine health and life opportunities of the most vulnerable individuals and communities, fuelling stigma and discrimination, and creating obstacles to proven health and social interventions.

As drug related deaths reach new records, the Government should be targeting limited resources on health interventions proven to reduce harms. These proposals will do the opposite.

We urge the Government to instead develop a genuinely public health centred approach. and focus on evidence-based health interventions that target those in need, while avoiding harmful punishment and criminalisation of the very groups we are seeking to support. This process can usefully be informed by emerging UK and international best practice, not least the growing evidence base, and ongoing research, from existing Police diversion programmes already operating in 14 UK Police authorities.

Yours sincerely,

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Association of Directors of Public Health
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NHS Addictions Provider Alliance
English Substance Use Commissioner's Group
College of Mental Health Pharmacy
The Police Foundation
The Criminal Justice Alliance
Liberty
The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Drugs, Alcohol and Justice
Blackpool Council
Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership
Addiction Professionals
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Anyone's Child: Families for Safer Drug Control
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Early Break
East Renfrewshire Alcohol and Drugs Partnership
European Network of People who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD)
Faculty of Public Health Drugs Special Interest Group
Foreningen Tryggere Ruspolitikk/ Safer Drug Policies (Norway)
Forum Akar Rumput Indonesia
Forward Trust
Fundación Latinoamérica Reforma (Chile)
GAT- Grupo de Ativistas em Tratamentos (Portugal)

Gay Men's Health Collective
Glasgow City Alcohol and Drug Partnership
Global Law Enforcement and Public Health Association
Green Leaf Party (Israel)
Groupement Romand d'Etudes des Addictions - GREA (Switzerland)
Harm Reduction Australia
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Harm Reduction Nurses Association
Health Poverty Action
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HIV Legal Network (Canada)
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International Network of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD)
Kaleidoscope
Labour Campaign for Drug Policy Reform
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Students for Sensible Drug Policies (UK)
Students for Sensible Drug Policy International
The Association for Humane Drug Policy (Norway)
The Centre for Justice Innovation
The Connection at St Martin's
The Corbett Network for Prisoner Reintegration
The Global Drug Survey
The John Mordaunt Trust
The Love Tank CIC
The People's Recovery Project
The Queen's Nursing Institute
The Scottish Institute for Policing Research

The Substance Use and Associated Behaviours Research Group
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