

# COUNTY OF EL DORADO

330 Fair Lane  
Placerville, CA 95667  
(530) 621-5390  
(530) 622-3645 Fax

**KIM DAWSON**  
Clerk of the Board



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November 14, 2023

Alessandra Ross, MPH  
Marjorie Katz  
Harm Reduction Unit  
CA Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS  
alessandra.ross@cdph.ca.gov  
marjorie.katz@cdph.ca.gov

Ms. Ross and Ms. Katz,

We truly appreciate you meeting with District Attorney Pierson, Undersheriff Golmitz, Placerville Police Chief Wren, South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Stevenson, Supervisor Parlin, CAO Tiffany Schmid, Placerville City Manager Cleve Morris, Placerville Vice Mayor Jackie Neau, myself and additional staff from law enforcement and the Chief Administrative Office on November 8, 2023 to discuss our request for the California Department of Public Health to deny the reauthorization of Sierra Harm Reduction in El Dorado County. We have a shared goal of ensuring the safety and well-being of all residents in El Dorado County, and we appreciated the opportunity to further clarify the steps El Dorado County is taking to promote public health and safety.

As background, it is helpful to note that on Tuesday, October 11, 2022, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors received a presentation from the Executive Director of the Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition to satisfy their reporting requirement by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) which authorizes their harm reduction services under Health and Safety Code (HSC) Section 121349. Per HSC guidelines, syringe exchange services are authorized when it is determined that conditions exist for the rapid spread of HIV, viral hepatitis or other blood-borne diseases. The purpose of the presentation at a noticed public meeting of the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors is to give agencies and the public "ample opportunity to comment" as well as to receive relevant statistics on local conditions. Following the presentation, board discussion and public comment, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors as well as the community expressed unanimous opposition to Sierra Harm Reduction's services and activities on the West Slope of El Dorado County. Furthermore, after reviewing local data, the Board of Supervisors did not find that local conditions exist that show the rapid spread of HIV, viral hepatitis or other blood-borne diseases.

When we met with you on November 8, 2023, you reiterated that from the California Department of Public Health's perspective, every county in California is at risk for the rapid spread of HIV. Furthermore, we understand that your department is charged with mitigating the *potential* for spread, and that you operate in the arena of "*what if*", not necessarily "*what is*".

We appreciated the opportunity to share with you the reality of what conditions we are dealing with in El Dorado County, as our direct charge as the Board of Supervisors and local law enforcement is to tackle the “*what is*”. Locally, it is our unhoused population that primarily is the recipient of harm reduction services. It is critical for you to understand that El Dorado County has had an extremely difficult time combatting homelessness, and it has taken us over ten years to finally come together on developing a response to homelessness. In February 2023, we finally opened a Navigation Center/Emergency Shelter with wrap around services and are working on a next phase for additional transition housing units. I cannot stress how difficult it has been to bring leadership, law enforcement and the community together on a shared path and plan, and still El Dorado County’s response to homelessness is fragile. We must do everything we can to support a successful course forward.

What we are finding is that harm reduction services and a needle exchange program in El Dorado County are working to sabotage and undermine our efforts. Local statistics show an increase in crime and drug related offenses directly related to syringe exchange programs and services. The County has seen 43 overdose deaths this year. Products received from Sierra Harm Reduction have been found at the scenes of these overdoses. The County is also seeing an increase in the number of syringes and other drug paraphernalia found in our public places, specifically our main County Library. The County is finding that residents of the Navigation Center leave during the day to meet up with Sierra Harm Reduction to receive these supplies and are stashing these supplies in the landscape around the Main Library. The Main Placerville Library is a vital resource for families and the presence of syringes and pipes is a public safety hazard. The County would also like to point out that in the application Sierra Harm Reduction indicates that they will be distributing over 150,000 needles and estimating a collection of only 125,000; potentially leaving 25,000 needles unaccounted for.

We understand that Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition has submitted an updated application regarding operating in El Dorado County and that the public comment period will close on November 27, 2023. The intent and purpose of this letter is to formally request that this updated application be rejected and their contract not be renewed. We also request that no other Harm Reduction Services be authorized to operate in El Dorado County.

The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and our community is working diligently to address the health and safety of all members of our county. While we understand the intent of the syringe exchange program, our community is vehemently opposed to activities which enable illicit drug use, as evidenced by data from the El Dorado County Sheriff’s office. This goes against everything we are trying to address at a local level. Furthermore, as we stated in our November 8, 2023 consultation, law enforcement, county and community partners are currently actively engaged in Narcan education and distribution to ensure public health and safety. We do not need the touchpoint of any harm reduction service to accomplish this important work.

We thank you in advance for supporting our local efforts to ensure the health and safety of all El Dorado County residents. The El Dorado County Board of Supervisors in concert with the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office and the City of Placerville respectfully, but emphatically, asks that you reject the reauthorization of Sierra Harm Reductions syringe exchange program in El Dorado County. The County is prepared to utilize all tools at its disposal to ensure that its residents are protected from the negative impacts of Sierra Harm Reduction Coalitions program.

Sincerely,



Wendy Thomas, Chair  
Board of Supervisors



Jeff Leikauf, Sheriff  
El Dorado County



Vern Pierson, District Attorney  
El Dorado County

