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Iowa State Legislators,

As the Chief of Police with the Iowa City Police Department, I commend the collaborative work of the Iowa Harm Reduction Coalition in organizing HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis prevention interventions with people who inject drugs (PWID). I fully support their mission to expand awareness and implementation of Syringe Services Programs (SSPs) for injection drug users.

Recognizing the increase in heroin related incidents and deaths, it is important that law enforcement develop partnerships with a variety of stakeholders to have an effective response to its use. Many police chiefs understand that while heroin use is a legal problem, it is primarily a public health problem that should be handled by public health officials. The challenge is how to get those who need treatment into the appropriate programs. SSPs create a point of contact with people with substance use disorders so they can access detoxification and treatment programs with help from community health outreach workers. Treatment combined with penalties for those who fail to comply with the law will curb these abuses and fatalities and make our communities healthier and safer.

SSPs save money and lives, and take used needles off the streets which protect law enforcement and increase public safety. Now is the time to lift legal barriers to SSPs, get more in operation and bring them out into the open through political support. I applaud the dedicated work of the Iowa Harm Reduction Coalition and encourage our state legislators to vote in favor of authorizing syringe access programs SF 2294.

Jody L. Matherly
Chief of Police