

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Liberal government to facilitate the opening of injection sites

Health Minister Jane Philpott announced to Canadians Dec. 12 that the current Liberal government will be repealing the Respect for Communities Act.

The current government's recent announcement to repeal this important piece of legislation and to replace it with a drug strategy supported by legislative changes (Bill C-37) raises several concerns.

Canadian families expect safe and healthy communities in which to raise their children. The previous Conservative government listened to families and, therefore, responded by introducing and passing the Respect for Communities Act. The Act ensures that families and local residents, as well as law enforcement, public health officials, community groups, municipal leaders and others are given a voice when it comes to opening a proposed injection site in their community.

Despite the previous Conservative government's actions to give families and local residents a say before injection sites can be considered, the current Liberal government announced the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy Dec. 12 to replace the current National Anti-Drug Strategy. The new strategy places harm reduction as a core pillar of Canada's drug policy. Furthermore, this new strategy will be supported by legislative changes with the introduction of Bill C-37 in the House of Commons, as was also announced by Minister Philpott, who was joined by Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale. Under our previous Conservative government, the federal minister was required to take into account the wishes of the community before granting a permit to open a drug injection site. However, under Bill C-37, that will no longer be a requirement. So even if a municipality has made clear its wishes to have nothing to do with drug injection sites, the federal government will be able to impose one whether residents want it or not.

Dangerous and addictive drugs tear families apart, promote criminal behavior and destroy lives. Instead of making it easier for drug addicts to consume drugs, the current Liberal government should support treatment and recovery programs to get addicts off drugs, as well as enact heavy mandatory minimum sentences to crack down on drug traffickers.

It is difficult to understand how this Liberal government, which claims to require social license when it comes to pipelines, is now ignoring communities when it comes to drug injection sites. Moreover, the current law, put in place by the previous Conservative government, is in line with the requirements handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada, but yet the current Liberal government now appears to be questioning the Supreme Court.

The Respect for Communities Act put in place by the previous Conservative government gives residents, police and municipal leaders an opportunity to be heard before a drug injection site is permitted to be built in their community. The current Liberal government's recent announcement to repeal this Act and to replace it with the Canadian Drugs and Substances Strategy, supported by proposed legislative changes, would facilitate the opening of such an injection site. In taking this action, the voices of communities will be ignored, which is most concerning. Canadians deserve to have their voices heard on important matters relating to the safety and health of their communities. Canadians deserve better from this government.