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BOB SCHURMEIER
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety
Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services

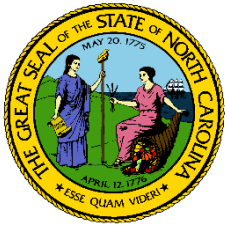
FROM: Robert L. Schurmeier Jr., SBI Director

SUBJECT: SBI Needle Disposal Pilot Project Report

Date: December 1, 2016

Pursuant to Session Law 2015-284, 1.(d). "Report. – No later than one year after implementing the pilot program required by this section, the State Bureau of Investigation shall report the results of the pilot program to the chairs of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the chairs of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety. If the State Bureau of Investigation deems the initial pilot program in two counties a success, the report may include a recommendation to continue the pilot in those counties for an additional year and may include a recommendation to add two additional counties to the pilot program; this would allow the extension of the pilot program for an additional year, and at the conclusion of that second year, the State Bureau of Investigation shall provide another report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety.

Following is the SBI Needle Disposal Pilot Project Report (Report on Biohazard Collection and Disposal Program).



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BOB SCHURMEIER
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November 21, 2016

Report on Biohazard Collection and Disposal Program
Authorized by SL 2015-284, HB 712

In accordance with Session Law 2015-0284, House Bill 712, a pilot program was established through the North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC) to collect used needles and hypodermic syringes to offer the free disposal of used needles and hypodermic syringes. Persons turning in used items were provided new, sterile needles and hypodermic syringes (hereafter referred to as needles). The purpose of the pilot program was to determine if the exchange of used needles would reduce the number of new reported cases of bloodborne diseases, such as, HIV, AIDs and viral hepatitis. Two counties were selected based on high rates of injection drug use and who were experiencing larger than normal number of new rates of infectious disease reporting and overdose deaths from injected opiate based drug abuse. No statistical data is available from North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Communicable Diseases Branch at this point. There has not been enough time lapse to determine if this program has had a marked impacted on the number of new cases being reported for HIV, AIDs and viral hepatitis. The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation Diversion and Environmental Crimes Unit was tasked with reporting the results of the pilot program to the legislature. Below is a brief summary of the pilot program and the results.

The two counties selected to participate in the biohazard collection pilot program were New Hanover County and Guilford County. These counties were selected due to high rates of injection drug use. Both counties tied for the 3rd highest number of heroin-related deaths in NC (behind Wake and Mecklenburg), which is a good indication of increasing amounts of injection drug use. New Hanover's heroin death rate in particular more than doubled from 11 in 2014 to 23 in 2015 and its largest city, Wilmington, was named the city with the highest rate of opioid abuse in the country by a Castlelight study.

New Hanover and Guilford were also selected because the NC Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC) has a strong presence in the injection drug user community in both counties, which was critical to establishing trust that enabled NCHRC to collect biohazard from users. In both counties networks of injection drug users were alerted through flyers and word of mouth that NCHRC would be collecting used syringes and disposing of them. Users were given an address to bring the syringes in Greensboro and Wilmington, respectively, and those who did not have transportation were provided with a phone number to call for an NCHRC staff or volunteer to come collect the biohazard.

NCHRC kept a 30-gallon storage bin at both the Greensboro and Wilmington locations for collecting the biohazard, most of which was delivered in sharps containers and duct taped laundry detergent bottles. These containers were weighed and by subtracting the weight of the empty container and dividing by the weight of

an average syringe, NCHRC staff calculated the number of syringes in each container. Syringes were not removed from the containers nor counted one-by-one as this would present a hazard, so reports on the number of syringes collected from each location are approximate. When the bins were full, NCHRC staff called biohazard collection companies, Stericycle in Greensboro and Mako in Wilmington, to collect the bins and replace them with empty ones. These items were incinerated at these facilities.

From December 1, 2015 to December 1, 2016, NCHRC staff collected and disposed of approximately 112,431 syringes in Guilford County and 32,686 syringes in New Hanover County. Several other counties were not part of the biohazard collection pilot program but nevertheless delivered their syringes to one of the two pilot locations for disposal. NCHRC received 4072 syringes from Cumberland County, 1068 from Brunswick County, 700 from Forsyth County, 92 from Wake County and 84 from Haywood County. The grand total number of syringes collected from this biohazard collection program was 151,133.

The total cost of the program was \$5,843.49 broken down as follows:

Biohazard containers: \$2178.88

Labels for containers: \$116.35

Scales: \$50

Biohazard collection by Stericycle: \$618.26

Contractor stipend: \$2880



NCHRC considers the biohazard collection program a success, however the need for continuation of the pilot program was nullified with the passing of HB 972, which legalizes needle exchange programs in North Carolina. HB 972 was signed into law on July 11, 2016; therefore syringes and other biohazard items in North Carolina will now be collected through legalized exchange programs and there is no need for a separate entity to collect items.