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ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL FIGHTS TO PROTECT RESIDENTS FROM OPIOID OVERDOSE DEATHS

Raoul, Coalition Urge Supreme Court to Review Third Circuit Ruling Preventing States from Implementing Lifesaving Solutions to the Opioid Epidemic

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul, as part of a coalition of 11 attorneys general, filed a friend-of-the-court brief urging the U.S. Supreme Court to hear a case supporting states' rights to enact public health policies that can prevent opioid overdose deaths and treat those suffering from opioid use disorder.

Raoul and the coalition are asking the Supreme Court to review a ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit that prevents Safehouse, a Pennsylvania nonprofit, from operating a lifesaving safe injection site that can prevent opioid overdose deaths. This medically supervised site would afford those who consume opioids immediate medical care in the event of an overdose. The federal government sued to prevent Safehouse from operating the program.

"Opioid addiction has destroyed lives and devastated families and communities throughout Illinois and the country," Raoul said. "States have the right to enact public health measures to best treat and protect their residents as they continue to fight the opioid epidemic. I am committed to ensuring that states, including Illinois, have every tool available to mitigate the opioid epidemic and address the impact to communities."

Medical supervision saves lives because death can occur within minutes of using heroin or fentanyl, a dangerous synthetic opioid, often too quickly for emergency responders to arrive on the scene. These sites also reduce the risks associated with public usage and contaminated needles. Safehouse also plans to offer drug treatment options, primary medical care and wraparound social services that can help treat those suffering from opioid use disorder. There are approximately 120 safe injection operating in 10 countries around the world.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 136 Americans die each day from an opioid overdose. Opioid deaths have been on the rise in the United States since 1999. The death toll now totals nearly 500,000.

[In the brief](#), Raoul and the attorneys general support Safehouse and urge the Supreme Court to hear this case because:

- **This is an issue of national importance that requires innovation at the local and state levels:** The opioid crisis affects every state in the nation, and states have reported startling numbers of overdose deaths and other dire consequences stemming from opioid use disorder. Many states and local governments are considering safe injection sites as one way to prevent overdose deaths and promote public health. The court's decision about the future of Safehouse could impact the future of other similar sites.
- **The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the opioid crisis and reinforced the need for more solutions:** According to the American Medical Association, every "state has reported a spike or increase in overdose deaths or other problems during the COVID-19 pandemic." Individuals with substance use disorders are at increased risk of COVID-19 exposure and of severe disease due to COVID-19. Safe injection sites like Safehouse offer users medical care along with lifesaving support, including immediate access to sterile injection equipment, opioid reversal agents like Naloxone, and pathways into drug treatment programs.

- **States have a well-established role in enacting public health and safety programs:** States are on the front lines battling the opioid crisis and have historically enjoyed broad powers to protect public health. For example, many states have implemented Good Samaritan laws, which encourage victims and bystanders to seek help for those experiencing a drug overdose by offering limited immunity from drug-related charges. States have also implemented needle exchange programs, which provide clean needles to prevent the spread of diseases. It is crucial that states and localities maintain the flexibility to act quickly to adopt public health solutions that address their residents' needs.

Joining Raoul in filing the brief are the attorneys general of Delaware, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia.