

Oct 25, 2021

Dear AG Letitia James,

I understand that your office will play an important role in deciding how the \$1.5 billion opioid settlement money should be spent. As a resident of 56 West 124th Street, one block away from several of the clinics including the upcoming Mount Sinai clinic between Lenox and 7th avenue on 124th Street, my family has experienced an intense degradation in the quality of life in the neighborhood and it has become highly unsafe for me or my 13-year old daughter to walk safely to catch her bus to school (see attached pictures from my block and the vicinity).

The increased draw of vulnerable people to the high-density methadone clinics has created a massive pool of vulnerable people for drug dealers to prey upon. In addition to the vulnerable population, the dealers attract addicts and prostitutes who are not seeking help, and the problem is exacerbated. Drug deals are done in the open, drug use is in the open, and the resulting loitering has led to a level of filth from trash, urination, human defecation, and rat infestations that we have never witnessed before. We have seen an unbelievable increase in crime and drug addicts and peddlers trespassing, theft of packages, gun violence and fights, drug overdoses, over a 100 drug syringes are picked up daily just in Marcus Garvey Park. The people on our block have got sick of making 911 and 311 calls as it would become a job in itself. This is unacceptable as a way of life to bring up our children, let alone expose 1,500 school children who are on my block and the block where the clinics are (Harlem Village Academies.)

Given the over-saturation of methadone clinics in Harlem (19% of the city's methadone clinics are located in Harlem; 75% of the patients commute in from as far away as Staten Island), we would like to see several things happen with the settlement money.

- Ask for an immediate and permanent moratorium on patient capacity and facilities in Harlem.

- New smaller facilities should be opened elsewhere in the city to allow patients the support they need closer to home. Simultaneously, the concentration of methadone clinics should be reduced by at least 2/3rd in order to more appropriately align with the actual local need. Moreover, the capacity of individual clinics should be cut way down so that no one location provides a rich pool of targets for drug dealers.

- Pay Mt Sinai to relocate all of their facilities to their hospital campuses by 2023 and replace with treatment the community needs like cardiac, diabetes, ear, nose & throat, etc. This will immediately result in a 2/3rd reduction of patients.

- Pay Harlem United' to move their needle exchange program to a location(s) that do not harm the surrounding community in Harlem. Mobile units could easily be stationed at train stations throughout the boroughs that are not in the vicinity of drug treatment facilities.

- Provide funding to local police precincts after the above to dislodge entrenched drug dealer operations and discourage new entrants.
- Provide incentives to drug treatment providers to create smaller facilities that offer additional wrap services at sites where the patients actually live and work.
- There needs to be an oversight role of the city, state, community boards on locations being chosen by providers and the money can be linked to that.
- Rather than offering methadone, the remaining clinics should offer treatments like naltrexone or buprenorphine that don't require patients to travel to clinics on a daily basis for treatment. Taking it a step further, methadone should be offered only as a last resort to avoid building up a concentration of vulnerable people upon whom drug dealers prey.
- There should be money invested in a professional support team for and daily cleaning of the 125th St & Lenox corridor and the adjoining streets from 123rd to 126th Streets. The streets have currently become a safety and hygiene hazard. The local community has essentially been abandoned to deal with a density of mental health and addiction patients who pose a threat at all hours of the day and who leave trash everywhere.

Thank you for your consideration and please reach out to me if you have any questions as I am living in this craziness right now.

Ila Gupta