

September 21, 2020

Mayor Martin J. Walsh
1 City Hall Square, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02201

Mayor Walsh,

As the Chair of the Committee on Public Safety and Criminal Justice, I recently participated in a walk through organized by residents of the South End and Roxbury. Residents invited me to participate after exchanging numerous emails on the dire conditions in the area of Mass. Avenue and Melnea Cass. Walking through the neighborhood I grew up in is always nostalgic, but lately it's heartbreaking—both for those in crisis, and for the residents who love their neighborhood and are doing their best to ensure their community is safe and welcoming. I know the City has put forth several plans with long-term solutions to deal with the opioid epidemic. I want to thank you and the current Task Force members for their work thus far. However, given the immediate and present public health and public safety dangers, the City needs to implement immediate short-term solutions.

Residents and I discussed a three-part approach that could become part of an immediate short-term action plan:

- First, what can be done to assist residents and those receiving services with immediate sanitation issues like restrooms and housing? While the Task Force has discussed temporary toilets, toilets have yet to be installed. While DPW and ISD are doing their best with cleanup, the placement of restroom facilities in strategic locations is essential and needed yesterday. I understand the risk of overdosing but right now we have folks defecating, urinating and overdosing on the street. During the walk through, we also talked to a man who has overcome substance abuse issues but is terminally ill. His belongings were in a cart because of the lack of access to a shelter. Throughout this COVID-19 pandemic we have activated several underutilized spaces to care for our homeless and sick, so what is keeping us from activating similar, temporary spaces for these homeless and sick individuals including city-owned locations.
- The second level of solutions that we discussed was decentralizing services from the Mass. Avenue and Melnea Cass area so services are equitably dispersed across the City and the burden of this crisis is shared by all. When residents reached out to healthcare providers across the city, the common response was that they believe the City needs to drive this decentralizing effort. One immediate step is to convene all health care

institutions, along with our civic resident leaders, to discuss what services they could offer, what resources they need to deal with this opioid crisis while in the midst of the pandemic, and what role the State, residents, non-profits, private, and other stakeholders could play in this decentralizing process. Decentralizing is not only about equity, it is also necessary for effective recovery as individuals commented on how hard it is to get sober when a safe injection site is right next to recovery services.

- The third level of solutions involves convening local elected officials from the Greater Boston area to discuss their municipality's plan for addressing the opioid epidemic and how they can assist us given that data shows that a large percentage of residents we serve are from surrounding municipalities. While I understand that Governor Baker wants to leave the individual plans up to each municipality, this I think is a mistake given the incredible burden Boston has to play in servicing residents from across the Commonwealth. I have correspondence into MAPC about such a convening with local councilors but do think this needs to be driven by the Administration and Task Force.

While the Task Force continues its work, I am happy as Chair of the Council's Committee on Public Safety and Criminal Justice to work in partnership, and join discussions on the above and any other short-term solution ideas. We owe it to the residents and the recovering community to act as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,



Andrea J. Campbell
Boston City Council, District 4
Council Committee on Public Safety and Criminal Justice, Chair

CC: Chief Marty Martinez, Governor Charlie Baker