Syringe-Exchange Advocates Seek Statewide Program

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Advocates in Bexar County, Texas plan to reintroduce a bill that would authorize local health departments to operate syringe-exchange programs to reduce the spread of hepatitis and HIV among intravenous (IV) drug users and their families, the *San Antonio Express-News* reports.

Although the Senate version of the bill was passed last session, it was blocked in the House by Public Health Committee Chairwoman Dianne Delisi (R–Temple), who resigned earlier this year. Undeterred, the bill's supporters will once again push for a statewide syringe-exchange program in the next session.

William Martin, senior fellow for drug policy at the James A. Baker III Institute of Public Policy at Rice University, believes that the bill will be approved. "No compassionate person wants to consign people unnecessarily to death or a living hell," Martin said. "Fortunately, providing [IV drug users] with access to sterile syringes allows us to be responsible, prudent and compassionate—and these are good criteria for public policy."

A year ago,three volunteers with the Bexar Area Harm Reduction Coalition—a private group that had been openly swapping needles with drug users—were arrested, drawing national attention to the issue.

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