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Council President Sandoval, Pro Tem Romero-Campbell, and Honorable Members of Denver City Council,

Thank you for your continued efforts to prevent overdose deaths in our city. I remain steadfast in my commitment to provide treatment resources at all stages of an individual's journey to recovery. This is why one of my administration's first initiatives was to create the Roads to Recovery program, which offers support to lift people out of the criminal justice cycle and onto a guided and supported path to treatment and stability. I am also supportive of the syringe access program as it currently operates, which is evidenced by Denver's continued funding for these services at over \$526,000 per year. Lastly, my administration will continue to offer assistance to current syringe access facilities with locating available real estate that is consistent with current ordinance requirements.

Ordinance 24-1791 is the wrong solution at the wrong time. I support harm reduction strategies and also believe we need to place more emphasis on connecting individuals from needle exchange programs to substance misuse services to help them break the cycle of addiction.

However, there are two serious concerns I have with this ordinance:

First it would allow for an unlimited number of needle exchange programs across Denver. There is no reason to remove a reasonable cap on the number of needle exchange programs, there is no evidence that the current providers need an unlimited number of sites and there is no evidence that residents of Denver want an unlimited number of sites. In fact, while data shows that such programs play an important role in preventing communicable diseases and preventing overdose deaths, the reality is that use of syringes to ingest drugs has declined and the current number of providers is able to meet the current need.

Second, there is no reason to eliminate common sense setbacks for regulated entities, including needle exchange programs. These programs already have the opportunity to seek a variance from the Denver Board of Public Health and Environment, something not afforded to other regulated entities. Even with these current proximity restrictions, 66% of the area available for medical zoning remains available for needle exchange facilities. There is no shortage of sites available to providers without eliminating the reasonable setback from schools that is currently in law.

For the reasons listed above, I will exercise my authority as Mayor under § 3.3.5(G) of the Charter and veto this piece of legislation. Despite the specific disagreement on this piece of legislation, we continue to share the common goal of preventing drug overdose deaths. I know we will continue to work together to tackle this urgent public health crisis and I look forward to our continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

Mike Johnston  
Mayor