



**Alder Sabrina Madison**  
**Seventeenth District**

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**Date:** Wednesday, December 17, 2025

**To:** Janel Heinrich, Director and Health Officer, Public Health Madison & Dane County  
Aurielle Smith, Community Initiatives Division Director, Public Health Madison & Dane County  
Members, Board of Health for Madison and Dane County  
Dane County District 12 Supervisor Tommy Rylander

**From:** Alder Sabrina Madison, District 17  
Alder Derek Field, District 3  
Alder Julia Matthews, District 12

**Re:** Request for Transparency, Process Corrections, and Conditions for New Harm Reduction Drop-In Center/Day Shelter Approvals

**1. Purpose**

We are writing to formally document serious concerns regarding the proposed Harm Reduction and Prevention Drop-In Center that the recommended provider proposes to operate at **1765 Thierer Road**. We represent districts that already host, or are preparing to host, the men's emergency drop-in shelter (Madison), drop-in day shelter facility (Field), and the Bartillon men's shelter (Matthews). The cumulative local impact on residents across our districts is significant and we are dedicated to ensuring any programming in this area is well-structured, culturally responsive, and appropriately resourced.

We want to be clear: **We support harm reduction as a public health strategy**. However, the placement and operation of harm reduction sites need to be planned carefully and with consideration for the supports that are essential to making them successful. Support for harm reduction does not mean support for **any proposal, in any location, advanced through any process without question**. As the elected City Alders representing this area, we are very familiar with the local challenges here and are in an excellent position to provide input and guidance on service needs and the resources needed to meet those needs. Unfortunately, we have only recently become aware the proposal was submitted, reviewed, and selected to move forward.

We request immediate corrective actions related to operational effectiveness and RFP processes and ask the Board of Public Health for Madison and Dane County (BoH) and Public Health Madison & Dane County (PHMDC) to work with us on a **more thorough, clearly defined engagement process that occurs prior to proposal approval**, as well as on substantive conditions that must be met before this, or any similar proposal, is advanced.

We also request a **joint meeting** with the Director of Public Health Madison & Dane County, the Community Initiatives Division Director for Public Health MDC, the Chair of the Board of Public Health, relevant Opioid Settlement Subcommittee members, and County Supervisor Tommy Rylander, as he represents the affected area.

## 2. Significant Structural and Operational Concerns

In Alder Madison's December 13th meeting with CAYA's director, Alder Madison stated plainly that the proposal describes a program that in effect functions as a day shelter. **The Director agreed.** The proposal's budget confirms this reality by proposing to provide:

- Food and meals
- Lockers, showers (if zoning allows), and laundry
- Long daily hours
- Transportation assistance
- Congregation of high-needs individuals

Yet this is **not planned, staffed, or funded as a shelter**, and that mismatch creates risk, is counterproductive, and has potential for significant harm.

This area is already home to the men's emergency drop-in shelter on Zeier Rd, the forthcoming Bartillon Shelter, the Safe Haven day shelter, numerous crisis-impacted motels, the busiest EMS corridor in the city, and several encampment sites in wooded areas that generate many calls for emergency services. **Please recognize that the City Alders who represent this area, which already hosts shelter services, are in an excellent position to identify critical gaps in this proposal.**

The proposal before the Board of Health **does not** include the following — each of which is **absolutely necessary given current area conditions**:

- **Shelter-Level Security:** Without dedicated security, staff and neighbors are left to manage escalations, trespassing, conflicts between participants, and off-hours spillover to surrounding areas. This is already a daily issue in the corridor.
- **Onsite Full-Time Mental Health Clinicians:** Current shelters in this area **already lack full-time mental health staff**, resulting in repeat EMS and MPD calls, crisis cycling without stabilization, and first responders acting as default clinicians. Adding another high-impact site without full-time onsite clinicians **will worsen this system failure**, not reduce it.
- **Housing Placements or Subsidies:** The proposal provides a place to spend the day, **but nowhere to go at night**. Without housing, people cycle between sites, parks, businesses, and shelters. Encampments persist and crises repeat. **Harm reduction without housing is incomplete and destabilizing.**
- **EMS, Fire, or MPD Resource Offsets:** The site is located in **Medic 8's territory**, the busiest EMS district in the city. Without offsets, response times here and elsewhere will suffer, first responders will remain overburdened, and the City of Madison will be forced to absorb these costs.

We fear that the current proposal by CAYA Clinic is being set up to fail without the above resources. This raises concerns about the City's ability to continue to meet the need for all required municipal services in this area given the City's significant budgetary constraints.

## 3. Faulty and Alarming Proposal and Selection Process

This proposal, as currently designed and advanced, raises serious concerns and questions that we would like to be answered:

- **Process Integrity:** At what point after the Request for Proposals had closed were the local Alders and City agencies operating in the selected area going to be notified of the selected application and its approved location? Before Alder Madison alerted the BoH to concerns with this proposal, the Board was set to vote to approve this proposal at its

December 12 meeting. If County officials had reached out to us during the RFP application review process and before selecting and going forward with an agency, we could have provided them with valuable information and insight into needs in the area.

- **Equity, Representation and Experience:** Are the staff of the agency proposed for funding equipped with the skillsets and hands-on care experience to serve this population and center the Black, brown, and LGBTQ+ people that they intend to serve? Also, is the staffing model diverse and is that diversity part of decision making at the leadership level? We also have significant concerns about the agency's experience with a project of this magnitude in a diverse, high-impact area of the city. What is the proposed agency's experience and success rate with this type of project?
- **Infrastructure Capacity:** At what point in the RFP process was this area's emergency response service and human services capacity going to be examined to determine whether existing capacity is adequate to meet the additional needs of this proposal?
- **Conflicts of Interest and Transparency:** Does a current County Board Supervisor work for the agency proposed for funding? We have confirmed through multiple sources that this is indeed the case. Has that Board member disclosed their association with the organization? Was that Supervisor involved in the creation of Opioid Settlement committee recommendations? Were they involved in the County's authorization of this RFP process? We have received information that indicates that the answer to these questions is yes. Is the Board of Health aware of this association? What checks and balances were put in place to make sure there was no conflict of interest or personal benefit accrued by said Supervisor? At a minimum, this association provides the perception of a personal benefit being accrued to them through their participation in this process.

The concerns we raise in this letter are grounded in data, lived district experience, and the actual contents of the application and budget.

At the December 12th Board of Public Health meeting when this was proposed for final approval, it became abundantly clear that not all Board members had read the RFP details and had not reviewed all submitted applications, although members were expected to vote on final approval of one of those applications. In writing this letter, we hope that we have successfully drawn your attention to several serious concerns and that you will work with us to address them.

Additionally, Alder Madison personally requested a copy of CAYA Clinic's application from Public Health Madison & Dane County and **was not provided with one**. She only received the application after requesting it directly from the CAYA director. **This is a fundamental breakdown of transparent governance and undermines public trust.** We strongly recommend that the BoH make the applications public.

#### **4. Lack of Engagement During Review, Selection, and Siting**

While Alder Madison was contacted by the applicant in October 2025 regarding a potential harm reduction grant, the concept described at that time differed significantly from what was later revealed in the submitted application and Public Health Madison & Dane County meeting late in the day on December 12, 2025. The scope that was ultimately advanced would function as a day shelter without shelter-level planning, staffing, or infrastructure—information that was not shared with Alder Madison during the application review period.

No follow-up communication occurred from the applicant, Public Health Madison & Dane County, or the County Supervisor representing the area during the review and selection process. We are surprised this is the case given that the [approved recommendations by the Dane County Health and Human Needs Committee's Opioid Settlement Subcommittee](#) specifically recognize the need for "careful planning and input" concerning the "definition, implementation, and measurable outcomes for the harm reduction center".

Alder Madison was only informed that CAYA Clinic was going to be approved as the provider during the meeting PHMDC scheduled for late in the day on the Wednesday preceding the December 12, 2025, Board of Health meeting—leaving virtually no time for a complete and thorough engagement process with the surrounding businesses and residents about the potential location in District 17. Alder Madison was also not provided with the application upon request at the BoH meeting.

**Given these concerns, we thank the BoH for agreeing to postpone their decision in order to gather more information.**

## 5. Conclusion


We formally request the following:

1. **Immediate Release of All Applications:** We formally request that all submitted applications be released to Board of Public Health members, impacted Alders, and the public. Transparency must precede deliberation.
2. **Collaborative Engagement Before Reintroduction:** No proposal should be reintroduced without a collaborative and thorough engagement process with impacted districts, documentation of community feedback, and demonstrated responsiveness to district conditions.
3. **Substantive Conditions for Any Future Proposal:** At minimum, **no siting in this area** without:
  - EMS, Fire, and MPD funding offsets
  - Housing investments tied directly to the program
  - Multiple culturally specific providers onsite and employed in a leadership capacity
  - Shelter-level operational and security planning
  - Onsite full-time mental health clinician
  - Rebalancing of services across districts countywide

We want to be clear that we support harm reduction as an essential public health strategy. Our concerns are not about if harm reduction is needed, but whether the necessary infrastructure is in place to support the proposed day shelter effectively.

We respectfully ask for a timely response and look forward to convening a joint meeting to address these questions and concerns collaboratively.

In partnership,



Alder Sabrina Madison  
District 17



Alder Derek Field  
District 3



Alder Julia Matthews  
District 12

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Cc: Dane County Executive Melissa Agard  
Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway  
Supervisor Patrick Miles, Dane County Board Chair  
Supervisor Heidi Wegleitner, Dane County Health and Human Needs Committee Chair  
Alder Regina Vidaver, Madison Common Council President  
Dr. Karen Kapusta-Pofahl, Common Council Office Chief of Staff  
Sam Munger, Mayoral Chief of Staff  
Chief Chris Carbon, Madison Fire Department  
Assistant Chief Chris Hammes, Madison Fire Department Medical Affairs  
Captain Ed Marshall, Madison Police Department East District  
Lieutenant Kim Alan, Madison Police Department East District  
Director John Schlueter, Dane County Human Services  
Director Jim O'Keefe, Community Development Division