Trump Administration Fights to Block Country's First Supervised Injection Site

Justice Department lawyers are fighting against a Philadelphia nonprofit's latest proposal to open one.

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The Philadelphia-based nonprofit Safehouse hopes to open the United States' first supervised injection site—a place where drug users can go to safely inject under medical supervision. But lawyers for the Trump administration are fighting to block it from opening, reports NPR.

Justice Department lawyers are arguing in federal court that Safehouse, is in violation of the national Controlled Substances Act, also known as "the crack house statute." Enacted in the mid-1980s as part of President Reagan's war on drugs, the law makes it illegal to manage a venue that allows the unlawful use of controlled substances.

Meanwhile, Safehouse argues that the law does not apply in this case, since the facility aims to save lives and direct drug users to treatment—not provide drugs. They also argue that the 30-year law should not be applied in the midst of a public health crisis.

Philadelphia's proposed safe injection facility already has the approval of the city's mayor, health department and district attorney, who announced their support for Safehouse in January 2018.

The Trump administration sued the nonprofit in February 2019 to block it from opening. In June, the Justice Department filed a motion for judgment, asking a judge to rule on the matter based on existing arguments. Since then, a number of parties have filed briefs in support of or in opposition to Safehouse's opening, and several hearings have been held.

Safe injection sites are already widely used across Canada and Europe. Studies show they can help significantly reduce overdose-related deaths and the spread of HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) among injection drug users. San Francisco, Seattle, New York City, Pittsburgh and Ithaca, New York, also hope to open up their own sites and are following the proceedings closely.

The Justice Department's motion for an official ruling on the matter is still pending.

To read the full report on NPR, click here.

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