



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054**

CAROLE A. FIOLA
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
6th Bristol District

STATE HOUSE, ROOM 446
TEL: (617) 722-2460
carole.fiola@mahouse.gov

Editorial -State Representative Carole Fiola - 6th Bristol District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sara Lapointe
sara.lapointe@mahouse.gov

Fall River, MA (December 1, 2016) –In response to the recent announcement of SSTAR, a local addiction treatment agency, to expand its operations to the former Border City mill location located on the corner of Weaver and West Streets, I would like to take this opportunity to register my opposition to the proposed project. As noted in the Herald News, this project will consist of 60 bed inpatient beds – 30 beds for individuals in detox, 30 in rehabilitation and an outpatient clinic for hundreds of patients seeking medical assisted treatment such as methadone and suboxone. There is also a planned research facility being planned to work on new treatments for this insidious and growing disease.

Over the last three years in my role as State Representative for the 6th Bristol District which encompasses the north end of Fall River and Assonet, I have served on the Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse. I have taken my role on this committee very seriously and have learned much about substance abuse and addiction and have been closely involved with legislation and initiatives to combat this disease. I have convened Community Conversation meetings for the public, presented to local Clergy and Primary Care Doctors on the issue, currently spearheading an ongoing Provider to Provider series with over 40 local providers who work with addicts and their families in order to share information and help reduce redundancy of services and increase the quality of outcomes and continue to bring statewide frontline experts to the community like DPH Commissioner

Monica Bharel and my Committee Chair Liz Malia to keep the community informed of ongoing initiatives. I do ride-alongs with our FRPD and witness overdoses, visited Drug Court, attend family support group meetings where I see the pain on their faces and meet with anyone who needs my assistance on this issue.

I believe that my actions show my understanding and compassion for the issues of substance abuse and addiction. However, what I have also learned during my tenure on the Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse is (i) opioid addiction is a very complex problem; (ii) we must continue to address the myriad of issues (prescription abuse, education awareness, alternate treatment options, treatment beds etc.); and (iii) that there are no easy answers.

My opposition to this project is not based upon the lack of understanding on this issue or a not-in-my-back-yard position. Rather my opposition is based upon the fact that the city of Fall River is already shouldering its fair share of the substance abuse problem and it is time for other communities to step up to the plate and do their fair share.

According the Massachusetts BSAS (Bureau of Substance Abuse Services), out of 351 Massachusetts cities and towns there are 32 Massachusetts communities that have methadone clinics. Boston is home to five (5) facilities, and Lawrence, Lowell, Springfield and Quincy all have one facility each. Worcester, Brockton, New Bedford and Fall River each have two facilities and the other 23 each have one (1). The addition of a third methadone clinic in Fall River would rank Fall River (population of 88,857) second behind Boston (population of 617,594), with regard to the number of methadone clinics. Fall River's 2 clinics provide daily methadone outpatient doses to approximately 2000 individuals. There are also 29 prescribers who have issued suboxone to over 2000 unique patients year to date for 2016.

This to me does not make sense. Throughout the last thirty plus years, Fall River has done more than it share for public housing, subsidized housing, drug treatment facilities, DYS facilities, homeless shelters and social service program expansions. While there is an overall statewide need, Fall River does not need another non-profit facility that distributes methadone or takes in individuals from throughout the state for drug treatment, drug detox or drug rehabilitation. Again, please be clear, treatment is indeed needed but it's time other communities step up and let's not continue to laden Fall River unfairly because these funds and services are needed all over the state.

We must view these types of projects holistically and determine what social and economic impact this type of facility or future type projects will have on the community as well as its abutting neighbors. We know that the beds in this facility are for people from throughout the state as they are primarily MassHealth clients that fill them and they will be discharged into the community without proper support systems. We know that the city will lose thousands of dollars in property tax revenue as a result of the transfer of the property to a non-profit. We know that the siting of this facility may have a negative impact on the real estate values of abutting properties in this area and further reduce tax revenues for the city. Please know I am willing to work in any way to help find an alternative location. I might suggest the grounds of Taunton State Hospital where a facility could be created by rehabbing and existing underutilized structure on the property.

Does this project make sense at a time when Fall River is looking to invest millions of dollars into its waterfront, strengthen its neighborhoods, diversify its housing stock to accommodate empty nesters and young millennials, re-establish commuter rail to Boston, increase educational attainment levels and improve the overall quality of life? We have done our part now it is time for another community to stand up.