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NEWSLOCAL NEWS

Commissioners vote in favor of starting Leon County needle exchange program

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Photo by: MGN Online



LEON COUNTY, Fla. (WTVX) — HIV and Hepatitis C are both blood diseases commonly transmitted by needles and syringes when people share them.

To help stop these diseases from spreading, The Leon County Commission voted 6 to 1, to pass the Syringe Needle Exchange Ordinance on Tuesday.

"The idea for these Syringe exchange programs is to get out into the community and provide them with clean needles in exchange for their dirty syringes," said Daniel Schaefer, a Medical Student Florida State University.

The only exchange program in Florida is in Miami-Dade County, they have collected over 400,000 used syringes.

A good thing for Miami Dade, but Bruce Grant doesn't think this program would benefit Leon County.

"This is not the right ordinance at the right time for Leon County if we had a drug problem like Miami, then maybe I would understand that," said Bruce Grant, a Chairman of the Leon County Drug Prevention Coalition.

Although the commission passed the ordinance, state law mandates that neither the county nor the city can fund the exchange.

The health department must find a private provider to pay for the program.

"Based on the statute, we have to do the ordinance that allows the health department to look for a private provider and funders and that's the most that the county can do," said Commissioner Kristin Dozier, District 5.

If they can't find a provider within three years the program will go before the commission for review.

The exchange program would also provide on-site counseling and education services to prevent drug abuse.

In July, Florida counties got the greenlight to start needle exchange programs. Now, it's up for debate in Leon County.

Tuesday night, you have the chance to weigh-in on plans for a needle exchange program in Leon County.

The county plans to officially approve the needle exchange program.

The Leon County Department of Health is trying get drug users in the county get the help they need while giving them clean needles to reduce the chance of spreading diseases. The program would allow people to receive clean needles and syringes after they turned in used ones.

If commissioners pass Tuesday night's ordinance it will give the okay for the county department of health to look for private funding for the program.

Commissioner Kristin Dozier says information she's seen about the program shows positive results.

"They have been shown to reduce disease transmission with drug users when it comes to HIV, hepatitis and other kinds of use," said Commissioner Dozier.

State law allows counties to start those programs as long as it does not involve using public money. That means to get this program going, it cannot be funded by city or county money.