

OFFERED BY COUNCILOR MINIARD CULPEPPER



## CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY SIX

### ORDER FOR A HEARING TO EXAMINE TREATMENT-CENTERED POLICY APPROACHES TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER, HOMELESSNESS, AND CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES IN THE MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE AND MELNEA CASS BOULEVARD AREA

**WHEREAS,** The ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area involves complex intersections between substance use disorder, homelessness, behavioral health needs, and systemic barriers to care that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Substance use disorder is recognized as a chronic health condition requiring treatment, recovery services, and long-term care, and the availability of voluntary treatment and harm reduction services is critical to promoting public health and social reintegration; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Individuals with substance use disorders who are involved in the criminal legal system are more likely to return to incarceration when treatment services are unavailable or inaccessible; *and*

**WHEREAS,** A 2023 systematic review examining criminal justice responses to substance-using individuals found that participation in treatment programs reduced recidivism rates compared to incarceration, and that treatment was the most consistent and significant indicator of longer periods without reoffending; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Additional findings from the same review found that individuals sentenced to incarceration for substance-related offenses were charged with a new crime at a rate of approximately 65 percent during a four-year follow-up period, compared to approximately 36 percent of individuals supervised under probation-based alternatives; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Participation in Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison (DTAP) programs has been shown to reduce the likelihood of a new arrest within one year to approximately

23 percent, compared to approximately 45 percent for individuals sentenced to incarceration; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Evidence-based treatment, diversion, and community-based care models may reduce pressure on emergency services, shelters, courts, and correctional facilities while improving health outcomes and social reintegration; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Publicly funded programs addressing substance use disorder must be implemented in a manner consistent with federal civil rights obligations, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to ensure that policies do not produce unjustified disparate impacts on protected classes; *and*

**WHEREAS,** The concentration of substance use disorder and homelessness services in a single geographic area may raise civil rights considerations related to equitable access to care, environmental justice, and the distribution of public health infrastructure; *and*

**WHEREAS,** Treatment-centered policy approaches, including diversion programs, voluntary stabilization services, and community-based treatment initiatives, have demonstrated measurable outcomes in improving service engagement and reducing involvement with emergency, judicial, and correctional systems when addressing substance use disorder and related public health challenges; ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***

**ORDERED:** That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to examine treatment-first policy approaches to addressing substance use disorder and homelessness in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area, including the potential civil rights implications of current service delivery models, the effectiveness of treatment-centered and diversion-based interventions, and lessons learned from other municipalities that have implemented comparable strategies, and that representatives from the Boston Public Health Commission, the Mayor's Office of Housing, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, community-based service providers, academic researchers, and officials from municipalities that have implemented care-first or treatment-centered policy approaches shall be invited to attend.

Filed on: March 4, 2026