To: City Council

From: City of Columbia Substance Abuse Advisory Commission

Date: March 19, 2024

Re: Revisions to Commission Name, Purpose, and Objectives

Mayor and Members of the City Council:

The Substance Abuse Advisory Commission (SAAC) is recommending the City Council consider updating the Commission's name, purpose, and objectives to align with current nomenclature and best practices.

When the SAAC was originally established in 1985, the terminology surrounding substance use was very different than where it stands today and as the years pass, language changes – both in how it is used and in how it is interpreted. With the increased conversation around substance use, particularly with the declaration that the opioid crisis was a public health emergency in 2017, the language associated with substance use has changed rapidly. Research from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) that informed their "Words Matter" campaign[1], noted that although addiction is a chronic condition, it is also a treatable condition. They went on to state that although unintentional, the language used when talking about those with substance use disorder (SUD) is often stigmatizing, which could lead to inaccurate thoughts about people with SUD, and possibly prevent them from seeking treatment.

The Words Matter campaign therefore recommended a change in the language utilized in the discussion of people with SUD, including the importance of using person-first language (*removing words that define a person by their condition or have negative meanings*) to reduce stigma associated with SUD. Specifically in relation to the SAAC, the following recommendations from the campaign informed our outlined changes in language:

[1] See "NIDA Addiction Science, Words Matter: Preferred Language for Talking About Addiction" - https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/addiction-science/words-matter-preferred-language-talking-about-addiction

**Talking about Using Substances**

| Use... | Instead of... | Because... |
|---|---|---|
| ▪ **Substance use disorder**<br>▪ **Drug addiction** | ▪ Habit | ▪ "Habit" implies that a person is *choosing* to use substances or can *choose* to stop. This implication is inaccurate.[5]<br>▪ Describing SUD as a habit makes the illness seem less serious than it is. |
| ▪ **Use** (for illicit drugs)<br>▪ **Misuse** (for prescription medications used other than prescribed) | ▪ Abuse | ▪ The term "abuse" was found to have a high association with negative judgments and punishment.[7]<br>▪ Use outside of the parameters of how medications were prescribed is misuse. |

Most notably, one of the terms used in the name of the Commission, "abuse," has been found to have a "high association with negative judgments and punishment." You will therefore see that any reference to "abuse" in our suggested language removes this term and replaces it with "use" and/or "misuse."

In looking at the current language about the purposes and objectives of the SAAC, it was also noted that there appeared to be a focus on prevention and elimination of use, which does not align with the national strategy pertaining to substance use/misuse. Although the desire is obviously to prevent any type of substance use, the true need in the field is education around the prevention of "misuse" through harm-reduction and awareness methods. It was also noted that a main point in the current purposes and objectives was focused primarily on the "youth of the community." This is a very important group to focus on, but it is now widely known that youth are not the only ones who our focus should be on – the entire community should be considered when looking at programs to prevent the use/misuse of substances.

With this being said, the following updates are recommended:

- An update to the Commission name from "Substance Abuse Advisory Commission" to "Substance Use Prevention Advisory Commission."
- An update to the Purposes and Objectives, as follows:

  To advise the city council in matters pertaining to substance ~~abuse~~ use.

  To make recommendations intended to ~~prevent and eliminate~~ reduce and prevent the ~~abuse~~ misuse of ~~alcohol and other controlled~~ potentially harmful substances.

To promote the coordination of programs directed towards the ~~youth of the~~ community intended to ~~prevent and eliminate~~ reduce and prevent ~~alcohol and substance abuse~~ the use of potentially harmful substances.

To promote policies of inter-governmental cooperation in strengthening existing alcohol and ~~drug abuse~~ substance use disorder programs.

These recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote of the SAAC at its March 13, 2024 meeting. It is our hope that these changes the SAAC to move forward in a manner that can truly help address our community's issues with the use/misuse of substances (*whether legal or not*).

Respectfully Submitted,
Molly Lindner, Chair