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Dorsey returns \$42,000 from drug treatment facility affiliates

Relations between the community and the proposed treatment center will be better “without the spectre of large campaign contributions,” the northeast councilman says

Above: 3rd District Baltimore City Councilman Ryan Dorsey. (J.M. Giordano)

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Councilman Ryan Dorsey has returned the \$42,000 given to him by seven people associated with a company planning a drug treatment facility in his district, he wrote on Facebook today.

The 3rd District Democrat said he returned the money on Wednesday.

Dorsey’s announcement follows *The Brew’s* [disclosure](#) that the councilman accepted multiple campaign contributions – comprising nearly a third of his total fundraising – from people connected with a Columbia-based company proposing an in-patient drug treatment center in Hamilton.

The article raised questions about whether Dorsey could act independently with such a strong financial relationship with the company, Clinic Management and Development Services Inc.

Dorsey did not address that question directly in his Facebook statement other than to say he took the money last October “with a clear conscience.”

And he emphatically pushed back against critics who have expressed concerns that the 104-bed center, proposed at 6040 Harford Road, might increase crime or otherwise harm the community.

“The stigma surrounding addiction is one of the most powerful stigmas operating in society today,” Dorsey wrote, pointing to the urgency of the drug crisis.

“In 2018, there were nearly 900 drug or alcohol related overdose deaths in Baltimore City,” he noted. “Nearly three times the rate of homicides.”

But Dorsey, who faces two Democratic challengers in the April 28 primary, signaled that he is not dismissing the concerns of residents.

“I also understand that the relationship between the community, health professionals and persons in need of addiction treatment is a complicated and fragile one,” he wrote.

That relationship, he said, “should have the chance to be built and succeed without the spectre of large campaign contributions.”

Drug Facility Debate

CMDS president Kevin Pfeffer said today he had heard the councilman was returning the money, but had not spoken with Dorsey “since October” or received the money. But he added, “I have not gotten today’s mail.”

The Brew reported that seven people associated with CMDS each gave Dorsey \$6,000 – the maximum a person or business can contribute to a candidate in a year-year election cycle.

At that time, Dorsey said he supported the proposed facility, but that his position had no connection to the campaign contributions.

He said accepting the money had freed him from many hours of call time with donors, allowing him to focus on legislation and constituent service.

Angela Jancius, president of the Westfield Neighborhood Improvement Association, criticized Dorsey for a lack of transparency in not discussing CMDS’ plans earlier with the community.

She is one of many residents who are opposed to the construction of a drug treatment facility so near an elementary school.

A 2016 study found that crime does not increase in connection with drug treatment centers.

Those fears drew condemnation from others, who called them inaccurate and irresponsible during a public health crisis.

Several cited Debra Furr-Holden’s 2016 study that found crime does not increase in connection with drug treatment centers (DTCs).

“Our research shows that DTCs do not impact communities any more than other commercial businesses,” wrote Furr-Holden, an adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Matter of Trust

Today, Jancius said she was glad Dorsey returned the money.

“Well, it’s very good, because it’s an issue of trust,” she said. “But I’m disappointed that his statement on Facebook mentions the crisis of addiction, but not the related crisis in education.”

“The community still has a lot of questions about zoning and the history of this property,” she added. “I’m not sure if there’s trust yet.”

Dorsey, who has been open about his own experience with addiction, struck a personal note in his announcement about returning the funds, decrying the social stigma he said “discourages those who need help from seeking it.”

“I’ve been sober for nearly 17 years and there are people in my life who I only see at funerals,” he wrote. “In many cases, whether the person is on the inside or outside of the casket is a matter of whether or not the person had access to treatment.”

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