

Floating Hospital Eyed In Massachusetts Opioid Fight

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State House News Service

Senators have a new idea to battle the opioid crisis: creating a recovery facility on a decommissioned ship.

Lawmakers have added a redrafted Sen. Nick Collins amendment (364) to their fiscal year 2024 budget, which approves a study to look into converting a decommissioned ship into The Floating Hospital for Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Recovery.

The Senate approved the study alongside 52 other amendments in a single voice vote on Wednesday night.

The converted “medical vessel” would offer services to respond to patients’ acute and chronic health needs, providing mental health, behavioral health, dental, primary and specialty care, according to Collins’ office, which said the vessel could be a cruise ship. It would also provide housing with wraparound services for those being treated on the ship.

The Department of Public Health study, if included the budget that will eventually emerge after House-Senate talks, would consult the Naval Construction and Marine Engineering program at MIT to look into the feasibility of the program.

Collins told senators on Thursday that the creative solution could help those living on the street in Boston’s Mass and Cass neighborhood, where frequent drug and mental health issues persist in encampments in the area.

“For years now, the situation at Mass & Cass and throughout our city and commonwealth have worsened without suitable state

intervention,” Collins said. “Now is the time to pursue new, creative ideas to address a humanitarian crisis affecting thousands of people and families throughout the area. The Floating Hospital would provide our health care professionals with a state-of-the-art facility in which to provide care, all while addressing the pressing public health and safety needs of the city.”

Collins added that there is a history of using floating hospitals in public health crises, such as when the U.S. Navy ran the U.S.N.S. Comfort as a medical vessel during the early days of the pandemic.

In 1894, Massachusetts doctors operated The Boston Floating Hospital to serve poor children on a boat floating in the Boston Harbor.