



Greg Landsman
Councilmember

202102773

September 13th, 2021

MOTION

Finding Sensible Solutions to the Operation of Plasma Centers in Already-Vulnerable Communities

We move that the Administration look into the potential of updating Cincinnati's zoning code to allow for sensible limitations on where plasma centers are able to operate* in recognition of decades of research showing the industry's unfortunate history of exploiting financially insecure neighborhoods and at-risk populations.¹ We further move that these findings and ensuing recommendations are reported back to Council as soon as possible, so to allow us to move forward with doing our part to protect already-vulnerable populations from further harm.

STATEMENT

There are health risks to donating plasma.

Short-term — fatigue, stress, poor nutrition, anemia, and passing out (some regular donors report passing out while driving) — and long-term — plasma donors frequently have fewer proteins in their blood (putting them at risk for liver and kidney disorders) and many plasma centers use sodium citrate in the donation process (which can lead to depleted calcium levels and other serious health-care issues).²

Because of these risks, the plasma industry is highly regulated in other countries.

In every other place in the world, you're only allowed to donate fortnightly and are banned from giving plasma more than once a week out of concerns for donors' health.³ In the U.S., people can permit up to two plasma donations a week, every week, despite health concerns. Despite this, for-profit centers often talk up the safety of donating so that many donors assume they are partaking in a "safety guaranteed" way of making money.

The lack of regulations for the plasma industry in our country makes it financially beneficial for plasma centers to give high-cash incentives to those willing to donate more often (despite the danger to their health),⁴ who they can reliably find in more financially-disadvantaged neighborhoods.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/01/sunday-review/blood-plasma-industry.html>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3001115/>

³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/05/blood-money-the-twisted-business-of-donating-plasma/362012/>

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/03/plasma-donations/555592/>

* (eg. similar to the specific zoning codes created for adult clubs)

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According to a study that examined 40 years of data collection on plasma centers across the country, plasma companies disproportionately locate their collection centers in more destitute neighborhoods — where populations of people may be so desperate for fast cash they put themselves at risk of illness (*if* they are even told of the risks) — with a researcher even commenting, “They’re surgically placing these.”⁵ And while there are technical requirements for donors (such as disallowing donations from those who are homeless, alcoholic, addicted to drugs, or have suffered head injuries), statistics show that many of these folks in at-risk populations are able to circumvent the onboarding process; in a study of over 700 folks experiencing addiction due to intravenous drug use, 27.1% had donated blood or plasma, and 82.2% of those folks donated after they had started using intravenous drugs.

Considering the well-documented risk to already-vulnerable populations when plasma donation centers are placed in financially-disadvantaged neighborhoods, we believe Administration should look into any potential zoning changes that could sensibly restrict the operation of plasma centers to certain areas.

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Note: This issue is was brought to our attention by community-members in East Westwood, who are concerned about a plasma center being opened directly across the street from a child care center and near existing identified “hot spots” for gun-violence.

⁵ <http://chrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PFC-presentation-web-version.pdf>

Additional Sources:

- <https://www.businessinsider.com/plasma-donation-industry-vulnerable-health-2021-3>
- https://www.salon.com/2017/12/14/medical-companies-are-making-money-from-poor-peoples-blood_partner/
- https://www.universitystar.com/opinions/plasma-donation-centers-exploit-college-students-and-the-poor/article_1311e7af-c0ba-5e88-b970-fe78e1d445f.html
- <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2008-11-19-081118058e-story.html>
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