

## HB 2385

My name is Reed Ritchey, and I'm the director of the Washington County Community Corrections Department. Today I'm representing the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors and will share some comments in support of HB 2385.

When someone is convicted of a DUI and placed on probation, the probation officer, and I think all of us, want that person to start treatment as soon as possible. But for those who are unable to pay for treatment, there is too often a delay in getting help, of weeks or months. Delaying treatment of a substance abuse problem creates a public safety risk.

Another reason to start treatment early is that most people are more open to the idea of treatment (and the need for some behavior change) the closer in time they are to the arrest, conviction, and jail sentence, when the fear and shame of it all is still fresh. In other words, there is a teachable moment, a window of opportunity, that we like to take advantage of by getting people into treatment quickly. We miss this opportunity when entering treatment is delayed due to inability to pay.

For some, HB 2385 will reduce or eliminate this cost barrier.

In the early 2000's when the state downsized the Oregon Health Plan, Washington County saw the percentage of successful probation completers go down noticeably. I believe it was, in large part, a consequence of fewer people having insurance to help pay for chemical dependency treatment. And when people fail to complete probation, they are revoked off supervision, using Court time and filling up expensive jail beds. I'm an advocate of doing all we can to make treatment accessible and affordable.

It seems arbitrary that a person can be convicted of felony possession of heroin or methamphetamine and expect insurance to help with treatment, but if convicted of a DUI, have no such expectation because your insurance company is exempted from providing coverage. Both situations involve a crime, both pose safety risks to the community, and both involve abuse of a drug. I think it makes little sense to base coverage on the type of crime or the type of drug involved.

Some would argue that paying for treatment is part of the punishment for committing a crime. The judges I know want people to get into treatment quickly and prefer there be no barriers. The punishment is supervision, community service, fines, restitution, and legal fees. Rather than being the punishment, treatment is part of the solution -- an attempt to address the problem that led to the crime.

I believe that passage of HB 2385, by facilitating access to treatment for those who otherwise would be unable to pay for it (or who would struggle to pay), is good for the individual and his or her family, and is good for the community at large. We all benefit when there is ready access to treatment.

Thank you.