

Good afternoon Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Anderson and members of the committee my name is Andrew Swanson and I'm here on behalf of Oregon Recovers in support of HB 2758. I'm also a person in recovery from addiction to heroin, methamphetamine and alcohol and celebrated four years of continuous recovery last November.

Oregon Recovers is a coalition of people in recovery like myself, our friends and families and the addiction counselors and peers on the front lines of the addiction crisis. Our mission is to end Oregon's addiction crisis by transforming the state's fractured and incomplete addiction recovery health care system into a recovery-based continuum of care that recognizes addiction as a chronic health condition that requires a lifetime of support.

Oregon Recovers strongly supports HB 2758 and urges the committee to vote yes. While the mechanics of this bill are relatively simple, the long term impacts it could have on the state's strategic efforts to address the alcohol-led addiction crisis are significant. **Alcohol is a toxic, addictive substance** and, as such, is the single largest cost driver and killer relative to addiction in Oregon. Virtually all public health experts agree that access and regulation play an outsized role in any government's ability to curb harmful consumption like underage drinking and binge drinking.

The OLCC and it's commissioners have long been aligned with the alcohol industry, making them an outlier among the nation's liquor control agencies in control states. While it's clear that the alignment of the OLCC has certainly helped grow Oregon's local alcohol industry and made it part of the Oregon brand, the unintended human and economic consequences we're experiencing outweigh the economic benefits.

A recent report by OHA and EcoNorthwest estimates that binge drinking alone costs Oregon taxpayers \$4.8 billion annually. According to the Alcohol & Drug Policy Commission (ADPC), untreated addiction is costing the state \$6.7 billion per biennium. In a letter addressed to the ADPC in August of 2020, Alcohol industry representatives stated that the entire economic contribution of the alcohol industry in Oregon totals roughly \$2 billion per year--leaving Oregon Taxpayers with a huge deficit. Despite this expensive subsidy, the alcohol industry enjoys some of the lowest taxes in the nation. The human toll is worse. Alcohol kills six people per day in Oregon, which is six times the rate of all drug overdoses combined. This puts an enormous burden on Oregon's public safety and healthcare systems, our cities and our counties.

The alcohol industry's overwhelming presence on the OLCC board was never more clear than when the OLCC moved unilaterally to allow the home delivery of alcohol last spring without ever consulting OHA or the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission on the possible public health consequences of that decision, despite this same policy failing in the legislature the previous session. Furthermore, OLCC's rule changes contradicted CDC and WHO recommendations that governments restrict access to alcohol during the pandemic. Simply put, there needs to be a greater degree of balance so that this agency can craft policy that is in the interest of *all* Oregonians.

We now know that alcohol consumption, along with retail sales have skyrocketed during the pandemic, presenting policy makers with an unprecedented behavioral health crisis in the coming months and years.

By requiring that two of the seven commissioners have a public health background we move toward achieving a balance between the public health of our communities and the profit margins of the large alcohol conglomerates which account for a large majority of alcohol sales in Oregon. Having experts at the table who can speak to the unintended public health and addiction consequences of alcohol and cannabis policies is a pragmatic and common sense approach to public policy. The intent of this bill is to ensure that these critical public health considerations are part of the conversation when the OLCC makes rules, not to dominate the conversation which is why we advocated for only two of the seven commissioners.

I'll leave you with one final statistic: In the last two decades we've seen the alcohol industry rapidly grow in Oregon, but we've also seen alcohol mortality rise 34%. This demonstrates a clear failure on the part of our alcohol control agency and its state partners to craft safe alcohol regulation.

Please support HB 2758 and bring a moderating voice to Oregon's cannabis and alcohol policies.