



Tuesday, February 1, 2022

Dear Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs Cate and Kropf, and members of the House Committee On Economic Recovery and Prosperity,

My name is Ron Williams; I am the Outreach Director for the Health Justice Recovery Alliance, which represents more than 75 community-based organizations across the state. Our work is centered on the implementation of Measure 110, the Drug Addiction Treatment & Recovery Act. We're focused on investing in the communities most harmed by the war on drugs — Black, Latinx, Native, Indigenous, and tribal communities. People of color and low-income Oregonians continue to be disproportionately harmed by Oregon's failed approach to addiction; they are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and underrepresented in the healthcare system.

I am here this morning to testify in opposition to the adoption of the -3 amendments to HB 4016. I am not opposed to the substance of the amendment, but I am fully opposed to its funding source because it would reduce access to harm reduction and addiction recovery services that are already saving lives.

The -3 amendment of HB 4016 would cut Measure 110 services by \$29 million per biennium. In only six months, that same amount of money has helped over 16,000 people across Oregon access critical harm reduction and addiction recovery services. Next month, \$270 million *more* is slated to be invested in increased access to lifesaving services including housing, peer support, harm reduction, overdose prevention and low-barrier recovery treatment services in every Oregon County.

The Measure 110 Oversight & Accountability Council received applications from service providers for \$390 million to support the creation of Behavioral Health Resource Networks (BHRNs), which will provide access to low-barrier addiction recovery services in every Oregon County. This is about \$110 million *more* than the OAC had available to issue to grantees. We simply cannot afford to cut these funds.

It was only one year ago yesterday that Oregon became the first state to decriminalize drugs through Measure 110. Prior to 110, almost 9,000 people in Oregon were arrested on drug possession charges each year¹. Measure 110 has averted thousands of these arrests and increased access to low-barrier addiction recovery services. The significance of this cannot be overstated. As a Black man I should know. I have experienced firsthand the injustices of addressing addiction through the criminal judicial system, rather than through the healthcare system.

When I moved to Portland in 1984, the war on drugs was raging. Inner Northeast Portland was under siege. People were afraid to leave their homes or let their kids play outside. The neighborhood was dominated by gangs, drug dealers, drug seekers, and police. (And for people who look like me, the heavy police presence certainly did not make us feel safer.)

I worked at a local hospital, and it was there that I saw how pervasive drugs had become. It didn't matter if you had a good job or were homeless; drugs were everywhere and it seemed like everyone was doing them. It was surreal to watch my co-workers – people with stable employment, happy marriages and homes – lost everything as they descended into addiction. I watched their careers disintegrate, their financial security evaporate, and their spouses and nice houses disappear. It really was a war waged against our community. And the drugs were winning.

Portland was supposed to be my fresh start, but my life eventually spiraled out of control too because of addiction. My wife left. She took our son with her. I lost my job. Eventually I lost my freedom.

Soon after my release from prison I reconnected with an old friend and co-worker from the hospital. He was in recovery. In one conversation with him I went from feeling aimless to hopeful. I saw someone who had lived the same life I had, gotten help, and was now successful and doing good work in the community. It was then that I started to believe a different type of life might be possible for me too. That was the beginning of redirecting my professional and personal energies toward helping

¹ Source: Oregon Criminal Justice Commission

people also stuck in what can feel like the utterly hopeless morass of active addiction. I have dedicated my life to this effort ever since I found sobriety.

A lot of us in recovery have stories like these — of being shown a way out of addiction after an encounter with someone who cared. Such experiences are transformative, and they shouldn't just happen by chance. There should be a system in place to connect people with support and give them the tools they need to live a better life. That's exactly what Measure 110 does.

Had Measure 110 been in place when I was struggling, I may have felt safe asking for help sooner. I may have connected with someone like me much sooner. That's the system we're creating now through Measure 110. As a member of the Measure 110 Oversight & Accountability Council, I am proud to play a part in facilitating this healing through how our council oversees the program and funds services. Measure 110 is already saving lives, connecting people to vital services, healing families, and restoring hope to the hopeless.

The Measure 110 Oversight and Accountability Council (OAC) has not even gotten full funding out the door to community organizations, and having lawmakers support any legislation that would cut this funding would result in devastating consequences. To put it bluntly: if these cuts are made to Measure 110 services, more people will die. As a person in long-term recovery, a community advocate and member of the Measure 110 Oversight & Accountability Council, I implore you: please, do not adopt the -3 amendments to HB 4016.