



OREGON ASSOCIATION CHIEFS OF POLICE
EXCELLENCE IN POLICING

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To: Members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response

From: Chief Jason Edmiston, Hermiston Police Department
Oregon Association Chiefs of Police

Date: November 6, 2023

Re: OACP Testimony regarding Law Enforcement Experience with Response to the Addiction and Fentanyl Overdose Crisis

Co-Chairs Lieber and Kropf, and members of the committee,

Chair Lieber and Kropf and members of the Committee, For the record, my name is Jason Edmiston. I am the Chief of Police for the City of Hermiston and I'm here today on behalf of the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police as well as law enforcement agencies who serve the Eastern part of our state. As background, I was born and raised in Hermiston and am currently in my 27th year serving a wonderful Hermiston community as a member of the law enforcement profession and as Chief of Police since 2012.

It is safe to say that there isn't a community in Oregon that isn't significantly impacted by our drug addiction and fentanyl overdose crisis. Personal tragedy, increases in property crime, a diminished sense of community safety and noticeable declines in liability may look different depending on your jurisdiction, but every community is experiencing the impact of the crisis we face.

Our police officers are one of the primary touch points in our community with those who struggle with severe addiction and behavioral health crisis. So far in 2023, Hermiston Police personnel and Umatilla County Fire District 1 paramedics have administered naloxone 57 times, up 57% from 2020. Similar profound increases in overdoses are occurring in jurisdictions throughout Eastern Oregon. Unfortunately, I believe the passage of Ballot Measure 110 significantly diminished our role and the tools our officers have available to help those who are suffering with addiction. We strongly believe that investments in stabilization bed capacity and evidence-based drug treatment are essential. However, we also believe that a system that lacks a way to compel people with addictions to enter treatment, will make other investments ineffective. As I say this, we don't believe a return to incarceration is the answer, but restoring an A-misdemeanor for possession with diversion opportunities is critically important.

Beyond impacts to those struggling with the disease of addiction, the crisis is fueling significant impacts on crime rates and is diminishing community safety and livability. In a recent 3rd quarter crime update to our mayor and council, I advised them total crime as compared to our 10-year average was up 37% with larceny up a staggering 50%. Burglary was up 28% from the previous

year. These increases come at a time when we are down 6 officers or 20% of our authorized patrol strength. And for context, our officers have to drive 30 miles one way to lodge someone in jail.

Throughout my entire career, Eastern Oregon has faced persistent resource shortages. Despite these challenges, counties like Umatilla and Morrow, along with smaller counties, have partnered with Community Counseling Solutions (CCS) to provide essential services. Our officers work closely with CCS to actively support pathways to success for those struggling with addiction and behavioral health challenges while holding individuals accountable for criminal behavior. The past 2+ years under CCS's management have been invaluable, yet the limited resources continue to pose difficulties.

In conclusion, I would argue the vast majority of law enforcement officers in our state are motivated by a desire to seek positive outcomes for those who struggle with severe addiction and behavioral health crisis. They need the tools necessary to effectuate the most positive outcomes possible for those who struggle and to keep our communities safe.

I would like to end my testimony with a positive story that took place shortly after I was appointed to my current position in 2012. A local woman I arrested for shoplifting in 2003, reached out and congratulated me on my appointment. She reminded me of the arrest and something I said to her at the time which caused her to seek sobriety from controlled substances and alcohol. Every May 13th, I send her a Facebook message congratulating her on her continued path which includes successfully raising her children.

Hermiston and the other cities and counties in Eastern Oregon are eager to partner with the Oregon Legislature to address the crisis through a comprehensive, compassionate and effective approach that can meet the needs of widely divergent communities with diverse populations and divergent resource capacity. For that reason, we support the recommendations submitted to the committee by the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police, Oregon State Sheriffs' Association, Oregon District Attorney's Association and the League of Oregon Cities. While it will require a significant investment of state resources, We believe it is a common sense, reasonable, approach that will offer real help to those struggling with addiction and help restore community safety and livability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.