

12/04/2023

Joint Interim Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Personal Testimony on Addiction and Community Safety

Hello, my name is Ray Wallace, and I use they/she pronouns. I work at the ACLU of Oregon but will be providing testimony in a personal manner today and not as a representative of our organization. I, like many Oregonians, am deeply familiar with the implications of addiction in our community. This past year two of my family members passed away due to medical complications directly connected to their addiction. I also have friends who have lost a loved one related to Fentanyl. This crisis is nothing unique to our state but what is unique is our proactive movement in the right direction, which is exactly what Measure 110 is.

I have previously worked in roles working with victims of crime/trauma, domestic violence, and sexual assault. All communities with high rates of substance use disorder. All I know for sure is that addiction is not a character flaw or human error. It is something that happens to someone. And something that person must choose to work through. The first thing you learn in victims advocacy is how important re-establishing autonomy is; giving someone a choice. I am concerned with discussions about implementing punitive punishment for drug addiction in Oregon and the ways this will exhaust our already limited resources. We have 60,000 Oregonians today who, thanks to M110, have opted to enter rehab. Forcing people into facilities will only take away autonomy from them. We know that rehab works when patients choose, and choice is something addiction takes away.

M110 did not create the issues our community faces today. We know that houselessness is nothing new in the state of Oregon, that COVID-19 exacerbated issues our community was already dealing with, and that Fentanyl accessibility has been a concern since [2013 with major peaks starting in 2016/2019](#), as recorded by the CDC. That trend has only continued and is not the result of M110. I urge the committee to listen to community members impacted by addiction, those who are actively working with clients or patients who are struggling with addiction, and folks discussing the ways punitive punishment will harm our Black & Brown community members the most. Addiction is a painful disease that cannot be dealt with by throwing people in jail. Our communities deserve to heal.

Thank you.