

December 4, 2023

Joint Interim Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony on Addiction and Community Safety

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Kropf, and members of the committee. My name is Zeke Harrington, and I'm a case manager for Multnomah Defenders Inc. in Portland.

As a case worker I help justice-involved individuals with treatment referrals. From that perspective, my clients are highly motivated for treatment, but facing a lot of roadblocks. Demand for these services is extremely high - not because of M110, but because of a long-term failure to invest in treatment facilities combined with a national addiction crisis.

We need to invest more in voluntary treatment services, not recriminalization.

The road to recovery is extremely difficult, even for those with means and resources. But for low-income Oregonians there's a shortage of beds and staff. Each of my clients faces long wait times, and these delays can affect whether they engage with treatment at all.

In some cases, these long wait times can lead to more relapses, more overdoses, or more criminal charges, and they end up costing our justice system even more time and money. And once that very expensive interaction with the justice system happens, they face yet another barrier to treatment.

For my higher-needs clients, who have been justice-involved for longer periods of time, it's even worse. These are the people our communities should be prioritizing for treatment, but they are the first to be turned away when providers are overburdened.

It is always going to be more harmful to the individual, and more expensive to the state, to treat substance use with criminal charges. Recriminalizing low level possession will not address our addiction issues, it will only make them worse. Instead, we must invest in voluntary treatment and the community resources needed to reach those struggling with addiction.

Thank you for your time.

Zeke Harrington