



December 3, 2023

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

**RE: Testimony in Support of More Treatment – Not Criminalization,
Policing & Jails – for Drug Addiction & Homelessness**

Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Kropf, and Committee Members,

My name is Sandy Chung. My pronouns are she, her. I am the Executive Director of the ACLU of Oregon. The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights with more than 27,000 members statewide.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my testimony supporting more treatment – not criminalization, policing, and jails – for drug addiction and homelessness.

Although you know me as the Executive Director of the ACLU of Oregon, to my loved ones, I am also a mom, daughter, spouse, sister, and friend. In my personal life and through my loved ones, I have direct experiences with poverty, addiction, and physical and mental disabilities.

Like many Oregonians, I am deeply concerned about drug addiction and increases in overdoses across our state and country, including amongst unsheltered people whose private suffering is in public view.

It is incredibly frustrating to see how decades of underinvestment in critical services has resulted in insufficient access to affordable housing, health care, and addiction treatment across our state – and resulted in very visible suffering on our streets and in our communities.

This is why the ACLU of Oregon team urges lawmakers to address pressing societal issues holistically – to address root causes instead of offering false promises. We've pressed for real solutions even as some deep-pocketed interest groups, in and outside Oregon, have manipulated the media, lawmakers, and everyday Oregonians with scare tactics because they want addiction, homelessness, and mental illness funneled through police and jails.

The data from 50 years of the failed "War-on-Drugs" makes this clear: access to addiction treatment and affordable housing are the solution to the drug addiction epidemic – **NOT** more police, jails, and criminal records.

It is important that lawmakers and everyday Oregonians understand the facts and identify the myths with drug addiction and homelessness so that Oregon supports real solutions. This is especially important because the interest groups pressuring lawmakers to rollback decriminalization of drug addiction are proffering false promises. These false promises will only make drug addiction and homelessness worse and more expensive and difficult to solve. They will also add even more duress to Oregon's policing and criminal legal systems, which already show very worrisome and deepening failings.

To help Oregonians understand the facts, the ACLU of Oregon created a [hub](#)¹ on our website to answer important questions including:

- **What do Oregon voters want?** They want real solutions, not false promises, including:
 - ★ increasing addiction treatment with recovery housing;
 - ★ increasing affording housing and reducing poverty;
 - ★ creating more safe and accessible shelters and temporary housing options to help homeless people into short-term housing;
 - ★ creating work programs for trash clean-up and neighborhood revitalization efforts;
 - ★ sending crisis counselors, instead of police, to respond to 911 calls about people having mental health or addiction crises.
- **Won't harsher penalties stop drug use?** The data is clear that criminalization worsens drug addiction, overdoses, and mental health and creates severe obstacles to housing, education, and jobs.
- **Did Measure 110 cause an increase in overdoses in Oregon?** According to a research study commissioned by the federal CDC, the data does not support

¹ <https://www.aclu-or.org/en/campaigns/solutions-safe-and-just-communities>

this talking point by those who seek to rollback Measure 110. CDC data shows that from May 2022 to May 2023, Washington State's overdose deaths increased by 37.13%, Nevada's by 24.21%, and Oregon's by 22.55%. Washington and Nevada do not have statewide decriminalization laws like Measure 110. According to experts, the increase in overdose deaths in these three states appear to be due to fentanyl very rapidly replacing heroin in these states during the pandemic when there were supply chain disruptions to heroin.

- **Did Measure 110 cause more people to become homeless?** The data does not support this. Oregon's housing crisis began long before Measure 110. Multiple studies show that homelessness in expensive cities like Portland is caused by unaffordable housing. Data shows that COVID-19 intensified this crisis.
- **Is the unsheltered crisis in Portland caused by Measure 110?** No. San Jose, Raleigh, and Tucson have the highest proportion of unsheltered people. These cities are not subject to a decriminalization law like Measure 110.

We encourage you to review the resources on our website and to let us know if more informational resources would be of assistance to you.

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Working together, we can and must create a state where all people are treated with inherent value and dignity and have access to basic human rights, including health care, addiction treatment, and housing.

Oregon is what we make it. Please help us make an Oregon with thriving communities, not more jails and prisons.

Thank you,
Sandy Chung, J.D.
Pronouns: She, her, hers
Executive Director, ACLU of Oregon