

Dec. 5th 2023

To: Joint Interim Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response

I appreciate the thoughtful approach this committee is taking towards the addiction crisis and applaud your resistance to politicizing addiction.

I also urge you not to be fooled by the false promise that recriminalization will somehow be a “quick fix” for the crisis in our communities. It would take years to implement the ballot measures proposed by Kevin Barton and Max Williams. We have already had a system with criminalization and no services. It didn’t work. If we decriminalized possession tomorrow we will be right back where we started.

The real problem we have in Portland is what the Oregonian has pointed out: Portland’s sobering center shut down in 2020 and local leaders have failed to replace it. Police already have, under the law, the ability to remove visibly intoxicated people from the street but they don’t do it because there is no place to take them, leaving people suffering with addiction outside with no options.

The homeless rate in Oregon has skyrocketed 23% since 2020 at the same time the fentanyl crisis swept across the country. It was a recipe for disaster.

Instead of wasting time on a divisive and controversial ballot measure that gives police another excuse to arrest homeless people, temporarily ousting them only to be immediately released, we should be pulling together and demanding an emergency response that focuses on mobile response units on the streets of Portland with the medical assisted treatment options laid out in the hearing on Monday. We should immediately open a new stabilization center in downtown Portland so that people seeking detox have a place to go. We should stop delaying the care that people need and address the crisis now.

Thank you,

James Jackson  
Portland, OR