

Dear Co-chairs Lieber and Kropf and Members of the Committee:

Oregonians deserve real healing, real safety, and real solutions to drug addiction and overdose deaths. Our leaders must do more to address the crisis in our communities, but regressing back to failed drug war policies is not the answer.

On a more personal note, I base my opinion upon years of experience in working with folks impacted by both addiction as well as criminal justice system involvement. This included years in the Juvenile Justice System followed by 5 years managing a community re-entry program for men and women returning to the community from incarceration. Currently I volunteer as a Court Appointed Special Advocate in the child welfare system, where the effects of both incarceration and substance abuse are seen in the lives of innocent children and young people. We need more access to treatment and support. Punishing people and attempting to force them into change is counterproductive and often extends the slow process of recovery while adding additional trauma and stress. We can do better!

Criminal penalties for people suffering from addiction disproportionately jails Black and Brown Oregonians and hurts people who are struggling. Courts are not qualified to determine whether or not a person needs drug treatment, nor should we force people into treatment when they are not ready to be successful in their recovery.

We deserve real solutions. Oregonians need housing, drug treatment, and mental health care -- and the needs are urgent. We must expand services so that people who want mental health and drug treatment can get it, and we need to reduce waiting lists and lines for detox services.

Handcuffs and jail cells cannot solve behavioral and public health problems like mental illness, homelessness, or addiction. I urge the committee to focus on helping our communities with real solutions that help people heal.

Sincerely,

Craig Bazzi  
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