



## PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFETY & JUSTICE

### Testimony for the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response December 4, 2023

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Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Kropf, and members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response,

Thank you for inviting testimony today about Oregon's addiction crisis. For over 20 years, Partnership for Safety & Justice has been advocating for public safety and criminal justice policies that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both.

This mission led to our organization's deep involvement with Measure 110 when it was passed by the voters in 2020. We have remained committed to the Measure's implementation and success.

Part of the approach that has been discussed in previous meetings of this committee is a return to criminal penalties for both the public use of drugs and possession of controlled substances. But what has not been talked about enough in conversations surrounding Measure 110 are the negative repercussions of reinstating criminal penalties for people struggling with addiction. Racial disparities in Oregon's criminal justice system would undoubtedly be exacerbated, a stretched-thin public defense system would have its burden increased, and those who are struggling with addiction would be saddled with criminal records that could bar them from housing, employment, and other social service programs.

We are not far removed from the infamous and failed War on Drugs. The policies implemented during this period provide the Oregon Legislature with a roadmap of the harms that certain policy choices can cause. Decisions to criminalize people who are struggling with addiction, while ignoring the need to treat addiction as a public health crisis and connect people to services, has contributed to the issues Oregon faces today.

Measure 110 is a needed culture shift away from the drug-war policies of the past several decades. But, there is a clear and understandable desire from the Legislature to make some changes to how Measure 110 works. But, *the public, law enforcement, and organizations across the state recognize that jail is not an effective treatment for people who are struggling with addiction.* In their testimony in front of this committee, you heard many members of the law enforcement community emphasize that Oregon cannot - and should not - try to arrest its way out of this problem. We agree.

Fortunately, there are ways that we can solve these current problems without returning to the failed War on Drugs and the criminalization of those struggling with addiction. Partnership for Safety and Justice would urge the committee to focus its attention on:

- 1. Rapid investments into the Addiction Treatment, and Behavioral Health, Continuum of Care.** Various Addiction Treatment and Behavioral Health provider associations have identified shovel-ready projects that, if funded, will be able to quickly increase access to life-saving services. This list has been previously shared with members of this committee;
- 2. Increasing partnerships between peers, public safety stakeholders, and service providers through the creation of “Community Public Safety Teams.”** These peer-based teams would specialize in proactive outreach to communities experiencing homelessness, and/or are using drugs publicly. They would be trained in de-escalation and overdose prevention, would serve as a connection point to a variety of services, and would reduce the burden on law enforcement.

Making these types of policy decisions and investments will improve Measure 110 service delivery, bolster the relationships and partnerships between key service providers and public safety stakeholders, and help move the state that we all love towards solving our current addiction crisis.

Thank you for your time.