

December 5, 2023

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

RE: Personal Testimony on Addiction and Community Safety

Dear Co-Chair Kropf, Co-Chair Lieber, and Members of the Committee,

As a concerned resident, I am frustrated by the calls to repeal Measure 110: **Addiction is a health issue, not a crime.** Oregonians deserve health-centered responses, as opposed to the expansion of more jails, prisons, and court systems. The longstanding reliance on punitive measures has proven ineffective and inhumane for decades, resulting in the squandering of trillions of dollars without effectively addressing the root causes of addiction. Moreover, this approach has exacerbated generational harm, particularly impacting marginalized communities that have been disproportionately targeted by structural racism.

Please prioritize your time and energy in investing in solutions to build Oregon's neglected and fractured behavioral health system. As a daughter of immigrants, I understand firsthand the struggles of finding culturally competent and trauma-informed behavioral health or medical providers—even educators—in a predominantly white state. The challenge extends to identifying with direct service providers. I can empathize with the difficulties folks face in finding recovery and support, especially when lacking resources and struggling to find peer support for long-term care including stable housing. Measure 110 direct service providers, specifically those led by folks with similar lived experiences, are fostering autonomy and ensuring safety, for communities most harmed by state-sanctioned violence and racism to access healthcare, housing, employment, and essential services. These wraparound services toward long-term cannot be offered in jails.

While Measure 110 has been scapegoated for perceived increases in petty crimes, addiction, and homelessness, it is crucial to recognize that these crises predate Measure 110. They are the result of years of government neglect and inaction, particularly concerning communities grappling with poverty. Having lived in the Lents neighborhood for over 20 years, which has a higher percentage of people of color, immigrants, and those with lower incomes than the citywide average, my family and I were consistently exposed to systemic issues and the visible suffering of homeless communities, a reality that had become normalized, but we never felt endangered nor feared for our wellbeing and safety. It is time that we distinguish the difference between feeling discomfort vs being in actual danger when we see communities suffering on the streets.

Now, as more people, especially those in wealthier zip codes, experience fear and insecurity, there is a tendency to blame Measure 110 rather than addressing larger issues such as gentrification, unaffordable housing, criminal convictions hindering employment opportunities, the lack of accessible addiction treatment, and the reliance on jails as the primary source of treatment, leading to folks ending up houseless with a criminal record. While there are multiple factors contributing to these challenges, reverting to old, failed strategies will not provide real solutions.

Criminalizing addiction and houselessness is akin to criminalizing poverty. Rather than stigmatizing those who have been failed by the system, it is essential to address the root causes of systemic issues by investing in the dignity of the communities most impacted, through comprehensive wraparound services, treatment, and housing. Relying on coercive treatment and jail cells to conceal communities suffering from addiction and/or experiencing houselessness squanders resources that could be better utilized by investing in community services that uplift and empower the state of Oregon as a collective.

Oregon is leading the nation, paving a pathway for moving beyond the drug war logic of criminalizing and policing directly impacted communities and rejecting the violence of mass incarceration. We cannot stop here, especially with showing younger generations, like myself, that it is possible to envision and implement policies to address systemic issues that truly heal communities.

I hope that our state continues to lead with values, refraining from criminalizing addiction, poverty, and homelessness. Thank you for considering my perspective on this matter.

Sincerely,  
Keely Nguyen  
Happy Valley, Oregon



PARTNERSHIP FOR  
SAFETY & JUSTICE



# Healthcare issues deserve Healthcare responses, Not criminal ones.

## **ADDICTION IS NOT A CRIME.**

A public health approach is the right policy roadmap to heal our communities and stop the ongoing harms of drug war policies.

## **CRIMINAL RESPONSES ARE INEFFECTIVE, COSTLY, & INHUMANE.**

We have tried to arrest our way out of this crisis for more than 50 years, which has resulted in higher addiction rates, more overdose deaths, and incarceration.

## **PEOPLE AGREE THAT IT IS INEFFECTIVE**

and cruel to arrest and jail people who suffer from addiction. Criminal records saddle people with barriers that prevent stable housing, educational opportunities, financial loans, professional licenses, and secure employment.

## **RACIST DISPARITIES DEEPEN**

when people are arrested and jailed for using drugs. Oregonians of color use drugs at the same rate as white people, yet are 4x more likely to be arrested in Portland, the 5th worst rate in the country.\* After M110, police can no longer use drugs as an excuse to stop or harass people of color.

## **STIGMA PREVENTS TREATMENT**

and makes it less likely that people will seek help. Threats of criminal responses or jail sentences tell people that their suffering is a moral failing rather than a health issue.

\* ["Portland Has 5th Worst Arrest Disparities in the Nation, According to Compiled Data."](#) OPB, February 12, 2021.

# Oregonians need treatment and services.

## Oregonians need healing.



– KATIE LECHUGA,  
FAMILY NURTURING CENTER

“Anyone who works with people experiencing addiction knows that when people are arrested for possession of small amounts of drugs, too often that starts a downward spiral. Criminalization created economic barriers, making it difficult to get a place to live, a job, or education, which only worsens cycles of poverty, mental health issues, and drug use.”

- Increased Treatment and Addiction Services
- Increased Behavioral Health Workers
- Increased Rapid Response Services on our Streets
- Increased Resources for Local Communities
- Increased Affordable Housing and Shelter

**REAL SOLUTIONS THAT OUR COMMUNITIES DESERVE.**



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