

Co-Chairs Lieber and Kropf, and members of the committee,

I am Gloria Ochoa-Sandoval, the Policy Director at Unite Oregon. Thank you for having us here today. For those less familiar with us, we are a grassroots statewide nonprofit organization that represents and is led by Black, Indigenous, People of Color, immigrants and refugees, rural communities, and people experiencing poverty. We work across urban and rural divides to build a unified intercultural movement for justice.

We have been working on Measure 110 since 2020 and working on decriminalization for much longer. Unite Oregon exists to address the intersectional impacts on our communities including Community Safety and Health Equity. Ballot Measure 110 was our opportunity to support decriminalization in a sustainable way, with health support for our communities.

Our Criminal Justice system was built to criminalize Black people. The War on Drugs, known as the war on “public enemy number one” according to President Nixon, was actually a war on Black and Brown people. The new Jim Crow is the use of mass incarceration for racial control. Even if this is not our intent today, it is the foundation of these systems and so the impact of any form of criminalization is the oppression of Black and Brown people, and people living in poverty.

Our communities have been crying for help for years. Measure 110 was only the beginning and we are still not done fully funding the needs this program has met. Voters passed this measure in 2020, the legislature worked on implementation policy in 2021, the State worked on the creation of the program through 2022, and our communities have only had time to implement for about a year. In that time, we have learned that it works for those affected but we have also learned that we do not have enough funds to meet the need.

Re-criminalizing our communities will not address the spike in drug use. Our members have gone through a pandemic, a health crisis, a housing crisis, and an economic crisis. Criminalization does not address these harms, it makes people criminals. In my own family, I have seen folks use drugs to escape the reality of their life. They were criminalized for it. And while incarcerated, their reality became worse. They were abused, physically and sexually, which was what they were escaping initially, and then they were returned to the streets with a record and the trauma that bars them from a job, that bars them from funding, that bars them from housing, and bars them from safety. Putting people behind bars is exiling our families, my uncle, from our communities.

Recently he received care support and I am proud to say he is sober. I can also confidently say, there is a solution to drug use and addiction. It is a full investment in the continuum of care, like overdose prevention. More so, making sure these resources are truly accessible, meaning they provide interpretation and translation, culturally specific support, near the transit line, and so on. For it to work, it will cost money, the same money that folks are considering to invest in criminalization, which is expensive. So I leave you with the question, are we trying to help our communities heal from drug use and addiction or do we want just want them out of sight?

Thank you.

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With respect,

Gloria Ochoa-Sandoval (She/Her/Hers)
Policy Director

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