



December 6, 2023

Co-Chairs Lieber and Kropf and members of the Joint Interim Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on December 3rd. I would like to follow up with more in depth written testimony.

I am writing in my capacity as an individual county commissioner. In Clackamas County, we believe recovery is possible. I am also a registered nurse who has cared for this population and a US Naval officer. Although I currently live in Wilsonville, I was born and raised in North Portland, and I am appalled by what I see happening to the community I grew up in. What is happening throughout the greater Portland area and much of Oregon is a crisis, and we have a moral imperative to act urgently to help those suffering from addiction and mental health issues recover. We should have a thriving metropolis, not boarded up businesses and parks that are unsafe to visit due to drug paraphernalia. It saddens me that as a community we are allowing people to slowly commit suicide by overdosing on drugs.

Counties and cities are at the forefront of the response to the drug epidemic. We provide prevention services, drug treatment, community corrections, diversion, jail, and prosecution – and you have the ability to provide adequate funding and legislative support so we can continue to do that work.

As you consider changes to Measure 110 in the 2024 legislative session, I encourage you to consider the following:

- We must change our philosophy from a culture that celebrates drug use and normalizes it. Fentanyl has completely changed the landscape and is a threat not only to the substance abuse user, but to Oregon having safe, livable, vibrant communities.
- Voluntary treatment isn't working for those that have zero capacity to rationalize or advocate for themselves – make possession of lethal drugs like fentanyl, heroin, and meth a misdemeanor A crime again and increase penalties for drug dealing and public drug use. The goal is to have additional opportunity to intervene and provide treatment.
- Give law enforcement the tools to steer addicts toward mandatory treatment and away from jail - Prioritizing diversion programs that put drug users on a path to recovery. As we modernize this system it must include options that allow individuals to choose treatment based in a recovery oriented system of care rather than criminal penalties. The goal is always treatment and a pathway to sobriety.
- Continue the funding mechanisms that Measure 110 provided and find ways to expedite the creation of recovery treatment and capital investment to counties to build out recovery assets like stabilization centers, service centers and recovery campuses.

- And finally, our beloved state cannot wait any longer to see changes, people are dying every day under Measure 110. Right now 80 to 100 people die monthly from a drug related death. I sincerely urge you to take significant action in looming short session.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben West". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Ben West
Clackamas County Commissioner
Registered Nurse