

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice Chairs Walters and Reschke, and members of the House Revenue Committee,

I am a 69-year-old disabled transgender woman and one of Oregon's Democratic National Committee members. I have also previously served as one of the Vice-Chairs of the Democratic Party of Oregon (DPO) and as Chair of the DPO's Stonewall Caucus.

I am writing to you today to urge you to vote NO on HB 2089. As I will go on to show you in this letter, the addiction treatment and recovery services that HB 2089 would defund are not just a political priority of mine, but a matter of life and death for my community, which has borne the brunt of our country's deplorably parsimonious and stigmatizing attitude toward mental healthcare.

I have always known that my perceived gender was incongruous with my innate and immutable gender. The challenges and ramifications of decades of living a bifurcated life have taken a severe toll on my physical and mental health. And while our society has come a long way in its recognition and treatment of transgender people, far too many of my sisters, brothers, and non-binary siblings in the trans community continue to share the pain of alienation and marginalization.

In the absence of care and support, it is not surprising that some trans people turn to drugs and alcohol. For example, NBC News reported on August 30, 2017, that a study published that year in the American School Health Association's *Journal of School Health* had found that "Transgender adolescents have higher rates of illicit and prescription drug use when compared to non-transgender adolescents," and that "transgender students were 2.5 times more likely than non-transgender students to use cocaine and methamphetamines in their lifetime and twice as likely to report the misuse of prescription pain medication."

The NBC report quoted Kris T. De Pedro, an assistant professor of educational studies at Chapman University and the study's lead author, who clarified that

...gender identity is not the cause of increased substance abuse among transgender students, but rather, discrimination is.

"When it comes to transgender teens, it's the transphobia that impacts [their drug use], not being transgender," De Pedro said.

"In order to reduce the likelihood of a kid to resort to drugs as a means to cope, there has to be some sort of social support mechanism," De Pedro

continued. "We have these drug prevention programs in schools that are for everybody, but we really need to fill a fundamental need for [transgender] kids, and that's the need to feel accepted and affirmed."

For far too long, jurisdictions focused on punishing substance users instead of addressing the factors that lead to addiction and helping users recover. By passing Measure 110, the people of Oregon demanded that their government handle substance abuse as a treatable medical condition, and that it fund evidence-based, culturally-responsive recovery care to meet the needs of patients across the state. This benefits all Oregonians in the form of less strain on the justice system and greater availability of better-quality care. And since transgender people have long faced discrimination and misunderstanding, Measure 110's reforms and evidence-based care standards go a long way toward helping people in our community get care when they need it.

I was outraged to hear that the State is now considering stripping millions from these treatment programs. Oregonians everywhere will suffer if HB 2089 passes, and transgender Oregonians, like our other underserved communities, will feel the cuts to addiction treatment and recovery care even more acutely. As Oregonians die for lack of care, the body count will reflect the inequities in access to care that Measure 110's funds were designed in part to correct. You may not wish to perpetuate discrimination against transgender Oregonians, but make no mistake, more of us will die if you strip funds from accessible, evidence-based care programs that meet our needs.

Please safeguard funding for recovery and vote NO on HB 2089.

Sincerely,
Michelle Risher