

Chair Bynum and the Honorable Members of the Committee on Economic Development and Small Business,

My name is Leah Maurer, and I am a community activist and mother of 3. I have lived in Portland with my family since 2009. Additionally, I was one of the spokespeople for the Measure 91 campaign back in 2014, founding a group called “Moms for YES on Measure 91” which proved to be pivotal in the passage of the measure that granted adult-use cannabis legalization in our state. Since that moment, I have worn multiple hats in both the Oregon cannabis advocacy and industry sectors and have pushed for a socially responsible and ethical industry every step of the way, which is part of what led me to become involved with the Oregon Economic Equity Investment Act, or HB 3431.

I am writing to urge your support of HB 3431 for several reasons. When we advocated for and passed Measure 91 in 2014, the will of the voters was to utilize a portion of the cannabis tax revenue for programming exactly like what HB 3431 will provide. Unfortunately, that measure was picked apart and this never came to fruition, allowing many other states to pass Oregon up in this area. Then, Measure 110 fully removed these funds from being able to help those who need it most, families and communities. We must be proactive and not reactive in our approach to this issue, by investing in children and families who need it most first, and THEN addressing addiction and treatment services down the line if needed. However, it has been proven time and time again that if people are given the support for economic stability early on, that they are less likely to have substance abuse issues later in life. It is, thus, essential that the cannabis tax revenue currently being used by Measure 110 be used instead of or in collaboration with HB 3431.

Over the last 20 years, Black people were arrested at 3.5 to nearly 4 times the rate of their White counterparts in Oregon for cannabis possession despite usage being equal across races (ACLU, 2013 & 2020). The criminal justice system stripped wealth from Black families. Oregon faces an imperative to address economic justice with the legalization of cannabis. Closing the wealth gap is a root cause solution to pressing concerns facing Oregon. The communities at the bottom of the wealth gap are the same communities experiencing the highest substance abuse mortality rates. Extreme poverty and substance abuse are intersecting issues in Oregon that must be addressed upstream and downstream.

The obvious next step for the \$150 million per year collected in cannabis taxes is ongoing funding of economic stability programs and substance abuse treatment for the most vulnerable Oregonians. The Economic Equity Investment Program (EEIP), created in 2022, directed Business Oregon to provide one-time funding to community-based organizations with solutions that build generational wealth for communities experiencing multiple economic risk factors. HB 3431 asks the legislature to make ongoing, economic justice investments with cannabis taxes to achieve positive change in the intersecting issues of poverty and behavioral health inequities. Please support HB 3431, for a better Oregon, and for a better humanity overall.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Leah Maurer