

I have worked on criminal justice reform for over 25 years. One goal has always been to stop considering substance use and addiction as a criminal issue and to address these as health issues. That is why I am testifying in support of SB 529.

Addiction to substances is a health issue, regardless of whether it does or does not lead to other behavior that is criminal. One goal of the criminal legal system should be to assist as many addicted prisoners as possible to address and end substance dependency. Let's provide treatment programs that are up-to-date and that work.

I agree with SB 529 that diverting sentenced individuals from a traditional correctional setting into structured programs that provide treatment for substance use disorders or cognitive restructuring has proven to reduce criminal recidivism in this state. Substance use disorders should be considered chronic illnesses, and as effective treatment is available, it should be used. Additionally, I agree that there should be more than one type of treatment program.

I strongly agree with the update in the bill of removing the previous requirement that prisoners participating in treatment programs engage in physical work and exercise, as this is not a necessary component of solving substance use problems. It is also important that prisoners who want to participate will now be required to consent in writing and sign a program participation agreement, as this will contribute to successful treatment.

Knowing that a very high percentage of incarcerated adults have substance abuse issues, I believe it is essential to increase treatment programs in Oregon, to allow more diverse and up-to-date programs geared to individual needs, and to offer a range of treatment services, such as engagement with peer mentors, educational and vocational services, and self-help groups. SB 529 provides all this, and it is a very positive approach which I endorse.