



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support for HB 2395

April 24, 2023

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, State Representative for House District 46, outer Southeast Portland. I am honored to write in support of HB 2395.

I want to thank Rep. Dexter and our House colleagues for their courageous leadership in creating this vitally important response to our growing fentanyl and opioid epidemic.

As a mother, a community organizer, and a state Representative, it is clear to me that our communities are struggling.

In mid-February, when we passed this bill on the House floor, a 15-year-old student at Franklin High School, in my district passed away from a suspected accidental fentanyl overdose. She was a 9th grader in high school, a daughter, friend, neighbor. She was a child.

This tragedy occurred about a year after two teenage students at McDaniel High School on 82nd Ave, died of fentanyl overdoses.

These three deaths, along with the countless other stories that I hear about from my neighbors, constituents and community members across the state make it clear that we must mobilize to support those suffering from addiction and overdoses. These deaths are devastating. They are also preventable.

Young people across the state are struggling with mental health issues and addiction. Opioid overdoses are a rising danger, with fentanyl as the leading cause of Death among Americans ages 18 to 45. Here in Oregon, opioid overdoses killed 745 Oregonians in 2021, and while the death toll from last year is yet to be finalized, OHA reports that the number of opioid overdose visits to Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centers in 2022 was higher than previous years.

While this is an issue that has profoundly impacted my own community in SE Portland, this is not just a Portland issue. It troubles me to hear the stories of our community members all across Oregon, in both rural and urban communities, losing loved ones to sudden and preventable drug overdoses.

This is also an issue of systemic racism. The Oregon Health Authority reported in 2021, that Native American, Alaska Natives and Black people are at the highest risk for unintentional drug overdoses. We must keep in mind that these populations have been disproportionately affected

by systemic racism and social, economic, and political injustices. Inequities in other sectors of our society impact health outcomes and increase the risk of experiencing a drug overdose.

I am heartbroken to hear the stories from around the state of overdoses, deaths, lack of access to treatment and emergency response. With this sorrow, I am grateful for the opportunity to support HB 2395, the Opioid Harm Reduction Package, to ensure that our communities have access to the resources they need to stay safe.

This bill includes many critical, lifesaving components. Today, I would just like to point out a few that I believe will have a powerful impact on the lives of my constituents and neighbors, especially the young people that this issue affects so deeply.

This bill will allow providers to provide confidential treatment to youth under 15-years-old if disclosing their want of treatment would put the patient at risk of harm. This will allow for more young people to receive support in preventing an overdose without endangering themselves.

This bill ensures protections for school administrators, educators and staff members who administer naloxone to students experiencing opiate overdoses. This will save students' lives if they experience an opioid overdose at school.

This bill will also facilitate cross-county communication when a youth dies due to overdose in a county where they do not live. It will require OHA to collaborate with Local Mental Health Authorities to respond in the community where the youth calls home. It is so important that local communities have the support and information they deserve when dealing with youth overdose deaths.

It is necessary that our communities, especially our young people and our most vulnerable neighbors, have access to services to mitigate and treat this tragic crisis.

It's important that every community across Oregon has access to the resources they need to stay safe from fentanyl and other opioid overdoses. We must ensure that our community members are supported, so that these tragedies stop occurring.

Thank you.