

Submitter: Karen James

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4002

Re: Oppose HB 4002

I oppose HB 4002 and efforts to criminalize addiction.

Addiction is a healthcare issue, not a crime. We cannot address the addiction crisis with arrests and jails, which add barriers to stable housing and increase overdose deaths. Instead our communities need more investments in treatment, including outreach teams and peer mentor programs. People need help, not handcuffs.

I am a parent of a son whose drug addiction led him to serving 6 years in Oregon's prison system. He needed help for his addiction and help was inadequate or simply not available. My son was a Talented & Gifted (TAG) student with a bright future. When he released from prison in 2014, he suffered from schizophrenia and remains on public assistance to this day.

Arresting and jailing people for addiction has never worked. Criminalization has inflicted decades of government harm and violence on Black and brown communities. Giving a new name to the old war on drugs won't change the results: HB 4002 will harm, not help, Oregonians.

People suffering from addiction need investments to the continuum of care. They need successful peer outreach and mobile crisis programs to help move people into housing and services. And we need law enforcement and service providers to work together to connect people to services. Oregon can do this work without making addiction a crime. This is the direction that our state should head.

I urge you to oppose HB 4002 and efforts to criminalize addiction.