

Dear Members of the Joint Interim Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response,

My name is Breanna Tupper, and I am writing on behalf of Community Outreach through Radical Empowerment (CORE), an agency dedicated to working with youth and young adults aged 16-29 in Lane County.

At CORE, our primary focus in regards to substance use is on addressing the root causes of substance use, namely a lack of community, resources, and opportunities. The Zephyr House serves as a space for young adults to engage with their community, and our case managers diligently work alongside participants to connect them with vital resources and advocate for employment and housing opportunities. At CORE we focus on empowerment of the individual, and I firmly believe that increased criminalization is not the solution, as I witness its negative impacts daily.

The funding Measure 110 has provided us significantly impacted the lives of our participants. This funding allows us to pay double deposits for individuals with criminal records or other barriers, prevent homelessness for those falling behind on rent due to illness or other life circumstances, and connect youth to education and vocational training. It enables us to distribute life-saving doses of naloxone and other harm reduction supplies, contributing to the reduction of overdose deaths and the spread of infectious diseases. It also allows us to educate community members about their options when it comes to substance use. There is no protection for funding in HB 4002, and the services we have been able to provide with that money will cease to exist, thus creating an even bigger gap in our community.

I wish to draw your attention to the critical issues faced by youth and young adults navigating the challenges of substance use, specifically the detrimental effects of criminalization on their efforts to move forward. The difficulties in securing housing and employment for individuals with a criminal record are real, and sometimes insurmountable. We find ourselves writing letters advocating for participants to be able to rent apartments and they are still denied, even after they have demonstrated significant improvements in their lives. Many continue to face denials, highlighting the counterproductive nature of criminalizing drug use. It creates a Catch-22 situation, stopping people from becoming the "productive citizens" the Commission would like them to be by denying them access to essential resources such as housing and employment.

I urge the Committee to allow Measure 110 the necessary time to demonstrate its effectiveness while also removing from their minds the thought that substance use and homelessness are the same issue, as easy as it is to tie them together. These are not the same issues, and to say that Measure 110 isn't working because there are homeless people on the streets doing drugs is very ridiculous-we have a housing crisis and a lack of safe space for people. Making people who use drugs criminals does not solve this problem, but further exacerbates it.

I understand that the Commission's intention is to create "criminalization lite" by offering deflection programs. I would like to point out the shortcomings of this approach, as someone who has worked in the field for seven years, beginning with current challenges with law enforcement's approach (or lack thereof) to distributing tickets and referrals to the BHRN hotlines. Expecting immediate expertise in street outreach and resource navigation by police officers is unrealistic, and a patient, collaborative approach is essential. I understand too that by criminalizing you are attempting to force people to access treatment, when this has not been proven to be effective. What is helpful, as shown time and time again, is access to housing first, economic opportunity and community support. Additionally, there are those who will not be able to immediately engage in deflection efforts who will receive a criminal record-so what about those people? When they are ready to move on to different things in life, but are being held back by their criminal record-what then? I would urge you to look at the foundations of substance use treatment rather than the band aid "solutions."

I would ask that you turn your efforts into establishing more residential treatment centers, outpatient treatment centers, and expanded access to medication assisted treatment. I believe your endeavors would be more fruitful if the Commission focused on creating equitable access to housing and economic opportunities, rather than criminalization. We've tried criminalization before, and it did not work. Why not try something else?

Thank you for your attention, and I ask you to continue supporting measures that prioritize compassion, rehabilitation, and community support over punitive measures.

Respectfully,

Breanna Tupper  
Community Program Manager  
Community Outreach through Radical Empowerment