

Submitter: Kimberly Sue

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4002

Dear honorable committee:

I am submitting written testimony to share my serious concerns about House Bill 4002 and the dangerous impact the roll back of Measure 110 will have on people struggling with substance use. I am an addiction medicine physician. I have worked on the frontlines of the overdose addiction crisis for over a decade and can attest to the reality that stigmatization and criminalization only make drug use more dangerous and lethal.

While the concerns of public suffering are very valid, criminalization, stigmatization, coercion are proven failures. Criminalization will not solve the issues on the streets in Oregon because it does not address why people are homeless. We have more than fifty years of proof that these drug war tactics only make things worse— overdose deaths continue to hit record highs, millions have been arrested on drug charges to date, and street drugs are more potent than ever. All this continues while effective treatment remains hard to find and afford. HB 4002 falls woefully short of meeting the need for addiction treatment services across the state. Despite a nearly 300% increase in new services funded by Measure 110, Oregon still has only 50% capacity to meet the need for substance use disorder services. HB 4002 would continue the troubling underinvestment in treatment services.

If we want to save lives, we need a more humanizing evidence-based public health approach which prioritizes treatment over punishment.

Stigma is also at the root of our drug laws that prioritize criminalization instead of care. I know because I've worked in jails and prisons. Anyone who wrongly says that criminalization is a pathway to treatment, or that it is "rehabilitative," does not understand the complex needs of people with substance use disorders and how wholly unequipped our criminal legal system is to help people. I did the best I could to serve my patients while they were inside, but I saw firsthand how their problems were only compounded and intensified by the time they left. Each time they left with a longer criminal record, making it harder to get back on their feet- a barrier to well-paying jobs, housing, and public benefits. The system is not designed to help people out of addiction, it is set up to punish them for a deeply stigmatized behavior.

Stigma kills. It breeds social isolation, criminalization, shame, and a lack of humanity that is deadly. But overdose deaths are entirely preventable when we're honest that people use drugs and deserve compassion and evidence-based solutions. This

includes responding to public suffering by centralizing responses to people on the streets: increasing street outreach, creating community-led crisis-response teams, and increasing access to evidence-based treatment and Housing first programs.

HB 4002 will result in more people going to jail, more people being harmed, more individuals being displaced, more families being disrupted, and more people dying from overdoses. We don't need more suffering.

I urge you to reconsider HB 4002. Treat addiction as a healthcare issue, not a crime. Expand access to treatment services and reverse course on decades of underinvestment in the services Oregonians across the state desperately need.

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Kimberly Sue, MD, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Medicine and Public Health at Yale University School of Medicine and a practicing board certified addiction medicine and internal medicine physician.