

Co-Chair Leiber, Co-Chair Kropf, and Members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response

Subject: HB 4002 Opposed

Dear Chairs Leiber and Kropf and Members of the Joint Committee:

Based on my personal and professional experience, I strongly oppose HB 4002, which would criminalize addiction and mental illness.

I had a family member diagnosed with ADHD when he was in primary school. The solution? Drugs. By the time he was a teenager, he was taking prescription drugs and experimenting with alcohol and marijuana to self-treat bipolar disorder. Rather than receive the mental health treatment he needed, he ended up in the juvenile justice system. That was the beginning of a long road which included prison, where he met big time drug dealers and people convicted of serious crimes like robbery, assault, rape, and murder. When he was released, his prospects were severely limited -- for housing, jobs, education, and stable relationships.

By the time he was 33, he was using methamphetamine as well as alcohol. A few weeks after his 33rd birthday, his body was pulled out of the Willamette River. The Medical Examiner found that he did not die of an overdose or drown. Those who were in touch with him at the time suspect murder. He warned his family that he was in trouble and being pursued. Authorities did not investigate and it has not been proven.

From my experience with him and my professional experience as an attorney and activist, I truly believe that had he not been forced into the criminal justice system at an early age, he would be alive today -- alive and a contributing member of society.

HB 4002 moves our community in the wrong direction. It assures there will be more young men and women who will lose their chance at a decent life. It will cost the citizens of Oregon more in tax dollars and harm than treatment ever could. The criminal justice system cannot solve our addiction and mental health crises. They will only contribute to it.

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

Sincerely,

Judith Armatta, Esq.
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