

Submitter: Thomas Dodson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4036

Dear Committee Members,

I am a retired general and forensic psychiatrist who practiced in Portland for 30 years. Like most Portlanders I am appalled with the status of our once beautiful city. The last time I was downtown I saw a man sniffing drugs, half unclothed in a small doorway on Burnside, while traffic flowed by. The degradation of life in Portland pervades the public consciousness so much that people are avoiding going downtown.

The most compassionate thing we can do for people who are suffering from the ravages of severe drug and alcohol abuse is to hold them accountable for their behavior. It should be a crime to possess drugs and people should pay the price when they choose to do so. Punishment may or may not solve their drug or alcohol problems, but it will lead to a saner public life for the rest of us. If we want to reduce the mortality rates from these afflictions, the best thing we can do is punish the people who are possessing drugs and thereby discourage others from following a similar path. Incarceration also gets them away from drugs they are using and gives them the mental clarity gained therefrom of choosing a better path forward.

Even among those who are motivated to stop using alcohol or drugs and have the resources to avail themselves of high quality treatment, the relapse rates are abysmal. About 20 to 30 percent of individuals are actually able to stop with the best available treatments we have available. It is a reckless fantasy to presume that providing more money, services, harm reduction efforts, are going to be the answer to this longstanding and difficult societal problem. To some degree, our efforts to help with those means, have a contrary conclusion of enabling the very behaviors we are trying to stop, not to mention creating and expanding a whole constituency of providers whose livelihoods are dependent upon the drug and alcohol treatment industry. Feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

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