

Submitter: Michael Gilbert

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4036

My name is Michael Gilbert, I'm an epidemiologist, father and Portlander, writing to urge you to reject proposals for increased penalties for drug possession. These policies have been demonstrably ineffective in deterring drug use, and in fact, often exacerbate the problem and cause further harm.

Lack of Deterrence:

- Research: Numerous studies have shown no significant correlation between increased penalties and decreased drug use, or drug-related person or population level health and social impacts.

- Focus on punishment: Increased penalties focus on punishment rather than the underlying causes of drug use, such as poverty, trauma, and mental health issues.

Negative Consequences:

- Mass incarceration: Increased penalties lead to mass incarceration, disproportionately impacting communities of color and further straining resources.

- Limited access to treatment: Incarceration often disrupts access to treatment and support services, increasing the risk of relapse upon release.

- Stigma and barriers: Harsh penalties create stigma and barriers to seeking help, leading to worse health outcomes.

- Public health concerns: Punitive approaches fail to address public health concerns like overdose deaths and the spread of infectious diseases.

Alternatives to Increased Penalties:

- Invest in treatment and harm reduction: Increase funding for evidence-based treatment programs, harm reduction strategies like syringe exchange, and mental health services.

- Support community-based solutions: Partner with community organizations to address the root causes of drug use and foster social connection and opportunity.

Increased penalties for drug possession are a failed approach that has caused significant harm. By investing in treatment, harm reduction, and community-based solutions, we can address the complex issue of drug use more effectively and humanely. Thank you for your time and consideration.