

Submitter: Sandra Hart

On Behalf Of: No to criminalization

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4002

I oppose HB 4002 and efforts to criminalize addiction.

Addiction is a healthcare issue, not a crime. We cannot address the addiction crisis with arrests and jails, which add barriers to stable housing and increase overdose deaths. Instead our communities need more investments in treatment, including outreach teams and peer mentor programs. People need help, not handcuffs.

I began volunteering with the Oregon Department of Corrections at the Columbia River Correctional Institute in North Portland in 2015. The men I have worked with who came into prison with addiction issues were released with addiction issues because there is little or no treatment inside the DOC. Several of them have died since being released. One of those men had earned a college degree during his 22 years of incarceration and died of an overdose eight months after being released. Incarceration for addiction issues is a huge waste of money, money that would be better spent in treatment.

Arresting and jailing people for addiction has never worked. Criminalization has inflicted decades of government harm and violence on Black and brown communities. Giving a new name to the old war on drugs won't change the results: HB 4002 will harm, not help, Oregonians.

People suffering from addiction need investments to the continuum of care. They need successful peer outreach and mobile crisis programs to help move people into housing and services. And we need law enforcement and service providers to work together to connect people to services. Oregon can do this work without making addiction a crime. This is the direction that our state should head.

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