

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this to oppose the passage of any law that increases penalties or further criminalizes possession or use of controlled substances. I am a defense attorney and a community member in Portland. I interact with those struggling with drug addiction both in my work and personal life. Further stigmatization or criminalization of addiction in our community is not the solution.

I work representing indigent members of our community in their criminal cases and a number of them are people who have or currently use controlled substances. The current overload of our criminal justice system and our current "Public Defender Crisis" will only be exacerbated by laws that increase penalties for and further criminalize drug use. Of note, any law that criminalizes use of a controlled substance in public will almost exclusively impact our houseless and transient community members. It will only serve to punish those who are in the most need of support and resources and that punishment will be because the city, county, and state, has not provided them with a place to live, except for the streets.

The number of barriers that we continue to place for our impoverished and houseless neighbors is not going to solve any problems with drug addiction. This would be a huge misuse of time and resources. Instead, we should be funding more recovery and treatment centers. In my work as a defense attorney, I have seen firsthand how overloaded our current resource centers are and how desperate those who seek out, but do not receive help, have become.

Further criminalizing drugs, drug use, and addiction has never been successful in solving drug abuse problems or helped to create a "cleaner" or safer community. Instead, it further alienates and pushes to the outskirts some of our most vulnerable members, yes members, of the community. It is also crucial to note that throughout history, those most affected by drug criminalization have been Black and Brown men.

My vehement opposition to these proposed bills is so strong that it is hard to articulate it. It is hard to put into words my plea to be heard on an issue that I oppose so deeply. We have never been successful in improving society through our continued criminalization of addiction. We never will be. I am asking and begging for you to hear us speaking against these measures: do not implement these measures or measures like them. Our country's history has shown us clearly the ineffectiveness of these laws and has repeatedly shown us the MASSIVE consequences that follow, namely, more poor people of color incarcerated in a never-ending cycle.

When bills like these are proposed, my mind immediately goes to Adam Walinsky's 1986 opinion essay "Crack as a Scapegoat". While I do not endorse everything written in that piece, there is too much that still rings true today, nearly 40 years later. Namely, the paragraph that reads "For our politicians, crack is a deus ex machina - a solution from the sky. After all, our officials can hardly be blamed for the Colombian peasant who stubbornly goes on growing coca leaves or for the evil "narcotrafficker" who imports the refined product. Thus, if we can blame

crime on crack, our politicians are off the hook. Forgotten are the failed schools, the malign welfare programs, the desolate neighborhoods, the wasted years. Only crack is to blame. One is tempted to think that if crack did not exist, someone somewhere would have received a Federal grant to develop it.”

I am asking you to do better than those before us and to do better for those that come after. Please do not allow these bills to pass.

Sincerely,

Audrey Faunce