

Submitter: Michael Cold

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4002

I oppose HB 4002. Mostly due to the attempt to re-criminalize addiction and drug use.

I'm a software engineer in downtown Portland who volunteers regularly to provide harm reduction supplies to those who need help staying healthy enough to make improvements in their lives. I do see the suffering of many people who struggle with addiction, and I do see how things have gotten worse in recent years in terms of the number of homelessness and overdose deaths. But we see similar trends across all of the United States and there is little evidence to support that what I see in Portland is the result of Measure 110 and not the significant societal changes that have occurred over that period.

Criminal penalties for drug use have long been proven to discriminate against the poor and people of color. Even the relatively modest, compared to other proposals, penalties presented in this bill push those who struggle with addiction further outside of our community. Jail separates people from their friends, family and healthy routines. Criminal records make finding jobs and housing significantly more difficult. Thus making recovery harder to achieve. Community support and healthcare are essential to providing effective drug addiction treatment.

On the topic of research and treatment, I do heavily support efforts to increase addiction treatment options and availability, but I believe treatment must be voluntary to be successful. This rushed bill includes proposals that seem just as ill-thought out as those that are now criticized from the original M110. It seems too little and too vague. Frustratingly, HB 4002 suggests setting up new systems and providing funding for services that attempt to process the re-criminalization of drug possession. Our courts and law enforcement officers will be forced to spend more time and money processing drug offenses. Instead of re-creating laws that were already unsuccessful and paying to enforce them, we should focus intensely on strategies that are more effective at addressing addiction and drug-related deaths. HB 4002 does not do that.

It seems like we are still trying to make our criminal justice system double as a mental health treatment provider. Which is a major step in the wrong direction, a direction that has long been proven by the war on drugs to be truly horrendous for the very large group of people who don't improve their lives by being treated like criminals.

I urge you to reconsider HB 4002 and all bills that attempt to criminalize addiction.