

## **Dr. Angela Carter; testimony for the 02/07/2024 Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response regarding HB 4036**

### **Position: Oppose**

Expecting measure 110 to heal all the ills of more than 50 years of the War on Drugs in 3 years is akin to pulling a patient out of bed and expecting them to go to work immediately after a near fatal car crash requiring full surgical reconstruction of their body.

Our state mental health systems are still in shambles, we don't have enough health care providers to meet the community's need for support, We do not have the infrastructure or treatment beds required to support people in recovery. Improving our systems of care so that people don't have to wait 3-5 weeks to begin their recovery should be your focus, not criminalizing and incarcerating people who need help. Adding more prison beds and taking funds away from recovery organizations only serves to worsen our state's mental health outcomes and increase state sanctioned racism, homophobia, transphobia, ablism, and classism. Is this your goal?

Putting law enforcement in charge of managing a state mental health emergency is a very poor decision. Aside from a complete lack of appropriate support for mental health and substance use recovery in the prison systems - for instance jails and prisons do not provide access to basic medication assisted treatment for recovery in Oregon - What we see in our Oregon prison systems is pervasive inequity. For instance, there are 5.4 times more Black and African American people incarcerated than white people. In other words, Black and African American people make up 1.85% of the total population in Oregon, and over 10% of the prison population. Crime rates between demographics are not significantly different, but profiling and arrests are. This is an unconscionable demonstration of racism inherent in the system, and should clearly inform you as to why law enforcement is not an appropriate tool for supporting a diverse group of people struggling with mental health concerns and social determinants of health that weigh heavily towards poor outcomes.

The National Research Council Committee on Data and Research for Policy on Illegal Drugs noted in their comprehensive 2001 report that the insufficient study by the US government of the impacts of its drug policies was "unconscionable". With this bill, you are seeking to realign our state with the same poorly researched and detrimental policies that were causing unchecked harm 20 years ago, and have created unfathomable damage to our communities for over 50 years. The data is clear on every front; imprisonment does not beget recovery, it

destroys peoples' lives, removes their agency and autonomy, and cripples our communities.

Drug War Hysteria in legislative policy serves to incite sensationalism and increase fear in the American public, it further drives us apart from our neighbors, but does nothing to educate people about substance use, reduce harm, or help people who are struggling with their mental health. It creates a fear based us vs them stratification that prevents marginalized people from uplifting themselves. Incarcerating people with mental health concerns enforces state sanctioned traumatization, further compounding institutional racism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism. This bill is not in alignment with equity and justice, and will fail Oregonians.