



Criminal Justice Study Group

TESTIMONY - HB 4002, HB 4036, SB 1555

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Substance use disorder, i.e. drug addiction, is a health issue, not a criminal issue. As community and legal system activists for criminal justice reform and smart policies, we know that there are multiple and complex reasons why different people get into drug use, and for most addicts, treatment "works" when (1) the person wants it and is ready for it and (2) the treatment providers are empathetic and able to address the individual's underlying causes. After it became obvious years ago that criminalizing the users in the "War on Drugs" was a failure, people looked for better solutions, and they found out what works.

The people who understand drug use as a health issue, and better practices for addressing it, created Measure 110. It didn't come from the Legislature. Lots of Oregonians voted YES! Before that Oregon was at the bottom of the list of states in terms of availability of treatment programs; so it would take some time to sufficiently expand these services. But the expansion probably wouldn't have happened if M.110 hadn't been passed. Now, just when the program is underway and working, legislators want to roll back its success.

It is obvious to me that legislators who want to recriminalize personal-amount possession of drugs either are ignorant about best practices for helping people solve addiction problems, or simply don't care about poor people suffering from addiction, especially those who have the additional problem of homelessness. "Just get them out of my sight" is the attitude of some people. But we have never been successful at arresting our way out of the US drug problem. And how ironic that some legislators want to recriminalize now, when Oregon has a crisis of not enough public defenders to represent arrested people!

HB 4002, HB 4036, and SB 1555 all have it wrong. Don't change E violations into C Misdemeanors. Criminal penalties for personal possession and forced treatment are not best practices. The Oregon Legislature should focus their attention and our money on helping homeless people living on our streets, which would also solve the problem of public drug use. Focus on the profiteering distributors and manufacturers of dangerous addictive substances. Educate more people about deadly fentanyl and opioids. Please don't go back to something we now know doesn't work.

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