

Submitter: Grace Rathbun

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.

As a restorative justice practitioner in Lane County, I have seen the tremendous negative impacts that even minimal involvement in the criminal-legal system can have on our community members and their loved ones. This is especially true for poor people, people of color, LGBTQIA2S+ people, people with disabilities, and members of other historically underserved groups. As a society, we need to be creating systems that minimize the amount of contact that people have with this harmful system if we truly care about cultivating safe and peaceful communities. This of course does not include re-criminalizing drug use to put some of our community's most vulnerable members into jails, prisons, or forced treatment. Voluntary treatment options, affordable housing, and harm reduction initiatives need to be funded and expanded, not criminalization. Let's focus on supporting human beings in getting their needs met.

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.