

## Measure 110 Testimony

Chairs Lieber and Kropf and members of the committee,

My name is Rebecca Menda and I am a defense-based social worker in Multnomah County. I have been working in public defense for two years and I am here to pledge my support for Measure 110.

Over the last ten years I have worked with hundreds of people experiencing addiction. What I have seen during this time is that almost all of those people WANTED help, WANTED to be healthier, WANTED to have stability, and WANTED to overcome the debilitating challenges they face on a daily basis. What I have \*NOT\* seen are people who develop motivation to work towards this while being punished in the criminal legal system, only to end up with more barriers, discouragement, and mistrust of a system that should and could be offering the tools necessary to succeed.

There are many reasons why people begin using and get addicted to drugs. Predisposition through genetics, abuse, trauma. Decriminalizing drugs is not, and never has been, one of these reasons. It is unfair and unrealistic to expect suffering people to move towards recovery when the resources needed to support them are not even equipped to manage basic human needs. In addition to more treatment centers, we must create and support low-barrier, harm-reduction environments where people facing addiction can go to build trust with providers and form human connections. Sending people to jail for their addiction is simply the opposite intervention.

Using a trauma-informed approach is a far more effective tool than punishment. Criminalizing mental health and substance use only kicks the can further down the road, harms our communities, and in no way actually works to reduce the impacts of addiction.

These are human beings that are part of our community and they are suffering. I have personally witnessed and supported people through the unbearable pain and despair that has already taken so many lives. The recriminalization of drugs will kick people when they're down and the detrimental lifelong impacts go infinitely further than I could explain in this short time. Addiction is mental health and mental health is a critical component of overall health. A healthcare approach to this crisis is the only humane way to save lives and promote effective and sustainable change.