

Submitter: Kelly Raths

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4002

Kelly Raths
Salem, OR 97302

February 8, 2024

Co-Chair Leiber, Co-Chair Kropf, and Members of the Joint Committee,

Thank you for your public service. I write to oppose HB 4002 and the efforts to criminalize addiction. I worked in Oregon's state prison system for over 15 years, starting as a Chaplain and finishing my time as an Assistant Director. I have deep respect for the people who work in our corrections systems, but they and the confines of their duties are not built to successfully address addiction.

Here's why:

1. Going to jail does not prevent Oregonians from dying. OPB's 2019 Booked and Buried confirmed there is, "a crisis of rising death rates in overburdened jails that have been set up to fail the inmates they are tasked with keeping safe." Jails have not gotten safer, stably staffed, or equipped to treat addiction since the pandemic and the publishing of this investigation.
2. Exiting from incarceration increases the likelihood of overdose. Researchers from OHSU and OSU published findings in 2023 that Opioid overdose risk is 10 times greater for those recently released from Oregon's prisons. Women are at particular risk dying.
3. Finally, the law has not led to the rise in overdoses. Research published in JAMA this last year show M110's decriminalization of drug possession in Oregon was not associated with changes in fatal drug overdose rates.

I understand a return to punitive motivation for seeking treatment feels like 'doing something,' but it ignores hard truths about addiction. I fear criminalization, given the citations above, may actually increase Oregon's overdose and death rates. I ask that we stay the hard course of community-based healing.

Sincerely,

Kelly Rath