

Haven Wheelock  
8039 SE Tolman Street  
Portland OR 97206  
[Haven.wheelock@gmail.com](mailto:Haven.wheelock@gmail.com)

**Joint Interim Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response Testimony**  
**2/7/24**

Chairs Lieber and Kropf, members of the Committee, for the record I am Haven Wheelock and I am here today to oppose the recriminalization of drugs at any level. With over 2 decades in working with people who use drugs, I have seen how the criminalization of people has done more harm than good over and over again and how failed drug war policies have only worked to make the addiction crisis worse both here in Oregon and across the nation. If arresting people was an effective strategy to address the crisis of addiction in our state and our country, then these policies would have shown their benefits already. Not only have they not shown benefit, but they have also been shown as a driver for mass incarceration that has disproportionately harmed our BIPOC Communities

Oregon was brave when we stood up and said that we wanted to begin treating Substance Use Disorder as the disease that it truly is instead of treating it as criminal legal matter. The idea of re-criminalizing drug possession when we know that the issues most concerning to the business community, like homelessness and public use are not being addressed feels far from brave to me. It may feel safer for policy makers to “go back to the old way” but that will not make it safer for either people who use drugs or the people who love them. And let’s be real, the “old way” was not good. Our homelessness and addiction crisis has been growing for decades. It was 2013 when I first testified to the legislature about our overdose crisis and the need for the legislature to act to pass naloxone laws. It was a crisis then long before we decriminalized drugs. I don’t want to go back to that, I want to move forward with real solutions.

I have seen firsthand how M110 has helped make it easier for people to ask for help when they need it. I have heard people tell me they are more likely to call 911 in an overdose because they are not fearful of arrest and how the services that M110 provides are increasing the options for where people can go to get care when they want it.

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While some of the ideas in this package could on their own be strong and helpful policies, including ensuring people on medications for their addiction can get housing and expanding pharmacy access for meds for addiction, I can't help but feel like these polices are being added to this bill to make people feel better about doing the wrong thing in recriminalizing drugs.

The system of deflection proposed in this bill will only cause more confusion for people who are using drugs and add additional burdens both on our social service providers as well as on the criminal legal system both of which are struggling to meet the demands of our current work. This system will not help to streamline people into care, rather make it more confusing for people who are trying to access care. Additionally, this plan lacks clear guides on how this work with be done and doesn't seem to understand barriers to reporting that may come up for community-based organizations around HIPAA/42 CFR laws.

While I understand that these things may be compromises that you all feel you can make to feel better about doing the wrong thing, they do not undue the harm that criminalization will have on our communities and our state and they will do very little to make a helpful difference in the lives of people living with addiction nor on the systems that are going to do the heavy lifting.

People deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and our addressing our addiction crisis requires evidence-based policies and intervention making. This package does not deliver these things and I ask you to please be brave and oppose it. Thank you.

Haven Wheelock