

Submitter: Kyra Spengler
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 someone who has worked in a residential treatment center, I have seen, firsthand, the harm that addiction causes. I have seen mothers fear what will happen to their children if their addiction sends them to jail or prison. I have heard them speak of the trauma that previous incarceration time has caused them. Jail and prison is not what those women, those mothers, those families needed. They needed treatment, jail and prison simply added to their trauma and delayed their access to a comprehensive treatment program. While there may be treatment programs in jail, without the ability to get treatment within the context of the world they will be going back to, that treatment won't be successful in the long run.

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.