



February 7th, 2024

To: Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response

From: Partners For a Hunger-Free Oregon

RE: In Opposition to HB 4002, Measure 110 Repeal

Co-Chairs Kate Lieber, Jason Kropf, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Angelita Morillo and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Partners For a Hunger-Free Oregon. We are a statewide anti-poverty advocacy organization with a small staff of 10. We understand that leadership comes from those with lived experience and that hunger and poverty do not exist on their own. They are the result of failing economic systems that require the exploitation of certain groups of people in order to continue. We believe every Oregonian deserves to feel safe and be treated with dignity, and that includes Oregonians facing health issues like addiction.

Partners For a Hunger-Free Oregon stands in strong opposition to HB4002, which sets the clock backward on the progress Oregon has made and reignites the failed War on Drugs. We are taking a stance on Measure 110 because research has shown that drug criminalization is directly tied to poverty, hunger, and the destruction of family units.

The criminalization of low-level drug possession begins a cascade of negative community impacts and increases food insecurity. HB 4002 makes the possession of small amounts of controlled substances a Class C misdemeanor, which is punishable by 30 days in jail, a \$1,250 fine, or both. It is highly likely that someone in jail for 30 days would lose their employment, and without the ability to earn enough income for themselves and their families, recidivism rates skyrocket. Communities that are most deeply impacted by the war on drugs also suffer undeniable social vulnerabilities including wage gaps, lack of housing access, and a lack of access to healthcare. In the long term, these added misdemeanor charges interrupt the stability of the individual and of the family unit and limit access to housing and jobs. This results in additional financial hardship, including restitution. All of these issues lead to a generational cycle of poverty and hunger.



In addition, Oregon has an astounding shortage of defense attorneys. According to the 2022 American Bar Association report, The Oregon Office of Public Defense Services is short nearly 1,300 public defenders or 31% of what is needed to provide effective assistance. This overburdens the public defense caseloads in a time when people with more serious offenses are already being released due to lack of counsel. HB 4002 establishes 36 new – and *expensive* – criminal system bureaucracies across the state. Individuals who receive a new charge will require a public defender, but will be faced by the dire shortage. Making access to treatment dependent on police and prosecutors is putting unnecessary and unqualified intermediaries between people and their healthcare.

If Oregon doesn't have enough attorneys to move people through the criminal justice system, if Oregon doesn't have enough jail beds to contain everyone who is poor, sick, and deemed "undesirable," if Oregon doesn't have enough treatment centers to address the root causes of the opioid epidemic, then we will inevitably pit people who are desperate for treatment against those who aren't ready for it. Our leaders must acknowledge that we are at a crossroads.

We can build more jails and prisons, find ways to contain and hide the problem, or we can treat the problem by investing in the healthcare treatment centers that Oregon has needed for decades. Since funding for Measure 110 began in May 2022, 233 organizations were established statewide, representing 42 Behavioral Health Resource Networks. These networks expand access for treatment, housing and harm reduction supplies. This past Summer, Portland opened its first detox center and it will service 1,200 people on a weekly basis. Measure 110 is working, and it needs time to expand.

The United States has the highest rates of incarceration in the entire world. If public health issues like addiction could have been solved through criminalization, the past 53 years of the War on Drugs would have done so. We are asking our legislators to take bold, imaginative steps forward and envision a new future for Oregon. Please vote no on HB 4002, and any other policies that recriminalize small possession of drugs for personal use.

Sincerely,

Angelita Morillo
Partners For a Hunger-Free Oregon
SNAP Policy Advocate