

Submitter: David Robinson

On Behalf Of: No recriminalization

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4002

Please do not recriminalize possession. Vote no on HB 4002.

Criminalization of drug possession has not worked to deter drug use¹. It makes the problem worse for the user and society by stigmatizing the drug use and driving the user into subversive conduct. ² A good deal of attention is directed at persons who experience mental illness and persons engaged in criminal conduct through the lens of addiction. This seems proper when we look at the treatment funding components of Measure 110. However, it misses a very big and little understood mark. A majority of the drug consumption in this country is done by people who don't commit crimes or experience social and familial disintegration³. They don't show up in data. Who are these users? They are us – our parents, and our children. Criminalizing possession only increases the chance that a young person's life will be forever altered by directing them into criminal justice. It increases the chance that a professional will lose their career. It maximalizes the racial disparities that we already know that come from over policing certain neighborhoods and vis-à-vis ethnic groups. Alternatively, decriminalizing small amounts of possession normalizes the experience of the vast majority of drug users. It allows for a clearer conversation of how drugs are used and opens up the conversation to start the long process to reduce drug use. It took decades to reduce cigarette use. We are only now seeing reductions in alcohol consumption. I believe that decriminalizing possession will start us down a path that results in a more thorough understanding of drug use, not just the drug users that we see, and ultimately lead to overall reduction in use.

I would like to conclude with two additional thoughts about why I oppose HB 4002. I voted for Measure 110. The Oregon Constitution may allow legislators to change voter approved initiatives. I oppose the process. I don't want my vote changed. Period. Special interest groups and lobbyists have more access to politicians than regular citizens. We voted for this. Now agenda-driven groups are looking to overturn what the people voted to make law. Resist that influence. Do not overturn what we voted into law.

Measure 110 suffers from bad timing and improper funding. It hasn't had a chance to work, yet. The pandemic and the stalled funding to drug treatment programs and court tanked any immediate success this law might have had. Also, it's not reasonable to expect that this change would have immediate effects. We're trying to undo decades of underfunding courts, housing supply, addiction, and mental health services. It's not reasonable to expect results in two or three years.

Vote "no" on HB 4002

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

¹ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2018/03/more-imprisonment-does-not-reduce-state-drug-problems>

² <https://nida.nih.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2021/08/punishing-drug-use-heightens-stigma-addiction>

³ <https://theconversation.com/many-people-use-drugs-but-heres-why-most-dont-become-addicts-35504>