

Submitter: Brent Norman Jr
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.

Speaking from personal involvement with the criminal justice system, there will be one chance in one thousand (at best) for an addict to go to jail, be stigmatized with a criminal record, then get out and become a productive member of society. I'm an alcoholic, and I received absolutely no services while I was in prison - even though I requested them. (I was told I wasn't an alcoholic because I hadn't had a drink since coming to prison - never mind that alcohol wasn't available to me!) Jails and prisons don't help alcoholics and addicts get better, treatment does. Had I not had the love and support of family members - which many addicts don't have - (I also had the love of a Power Greater than myself, which untreated alcoholics and addicts won't turn to) I would have ended up just another unhoused alcoholic/addict - another meaningless statistic, with no other option than to commit crimes in order to support myself. I would have been nothing more than a leech upon society. Instead, I was blessed with opportunities to recover - and even though disabled, I have found ways to give back. (I volunteered at a nonprofit for well over 10 years.)

From my own perspective, you have two options: one, is to recriminalize small amounts of drug possession and cost the taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars to care for these addicts while incarcerated; or, two, you can provide them treatment at a fraction of the cost - and possibly end up with another productive member of society, contributing to the common good, rather than being a stigmatized ex-con.

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.