



Samoa Pacific Development Corporation

February 7, 2024

Re HB4002: Oppose Recriminalization, Invest in Treatment

Co-Chairs Leiber and Kropf, Members of the Committee,

We agree that there is a need to address the crises of addiction and overdoses. And problems don't solve problems, but instead we need to focus on solutions that would solve problems and save lives.

We can't arrest our way out of a public health crisis

The presence of drug arrests or charges create barriers that have an impact that last a lifetime. A criminal record for even a misdemeanor drug charge is often a barrier to obtaining a job, accessing housing, qualifying for loans, and disqualification from getting a professional license. Thus worsening health outcomes and causing intergenerational trauma.

Criminalization contributes to stigma that deters individuals from seeking health services. But also affects the provision of those providing health services. Addiction and mental health concerns are health issues and should be treated as such and not as a crime.

We need real solutions that will save lives without criminalizing addiction or returning to failed drug policies

- We don't have the state funding to expand treatment and for expanded criminalization
- Incarceration is expensive for taxpayers and in terms of intergenerational trauma. Drug criminalization record shows a disproportionate harm to our Black and Brown community in Oregon¹ due to systemic racism regardless of similar rates of drug use across race and ethnicity.²
- Our communities who are most harmed by the war on drugs and overdose crisis cannot continue to be targeted by police and face barriers with accessing meaningful treatment, housing, and legal representation

¹ Racial Disparities in Oregon Prison and Jail Incarceration Rates 2021:

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OR.html>

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2022 Report:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2022-nsduh-annual-national-report>

Our state needs a massive investment in treatment centers, capacity building, and barriers to treatment. Therefore, we urge our lawmakers to bridge the gap in funding before returning to ineffective criminalization policies.

We must continue to lean into a healthcare approach in making a positive difference. This is not a time for divisiveness, but rather a time for our elected leaders to step up and do more to address the ongoing drug crisis. We owe it to our communities to provide unified support to save lives.

Thank you for your commitment to our communities in Oregon,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nat J. Fuataga". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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On Behalf of Samoa Pacific Development Corporation,
The Regional Health Equity Coalition of Southern Oregon

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