



ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES

— OF OREGON —

February 8, 2024

RE: Testimony in Opposition of Recriminalizing Drug **Possession**

Chair Lieber, Chair Kropf, and members of the Committee,

My name is Lorena Ambriz and I am testifying on behalf of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) in opposition of recriminalizing drug possession. EMO is a statewide association of faith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through public policy advocacy, direct service programs, creation justice, and interreligious education and dialogue. We do this work while affirming the value of love, the respect of all life, and the dignity of every human being.

We understand the nation, including Oregon, is facing an addiction crisis. We can see the damage caused to those who are using, and the hurt their loved ones are facing. We are aware of the impact this pandemic has had and continues to have on the perceptions and feelings of public safety in our communities. As people of faith and compassion, we want to end the social injustice found in global poverty, oppression, and disease. However, **recriminalization is NOT the way forward.**

We have been using criminalization as a means to stop drug use in the United State since the 1970s and where has that lead us? In the 1970s the death rate for drug overdose was roughly three out of 100,000 people, by the end of the 1990s, that number was seven, by 2010 it was 13, and in 2020 it rose to 29. **Under tough-on-crime laws against drug use, drug overdose rose by nearly tenfold in 50 years.** Oregonians voted for decriminalization, in light of its ineffectiveness and with the understanding that this is a public health issue. **We gave criminalization a 50 year trial and it failed.** We must allow community programs, peer sponsors, and healthcare providers to continue the work they have been doing since the implementation of Measure 110.

The war on drugs was intentionally created to suppress the social and economic growth of the Black community, specifically targeting Black men. Today, this war continues to disproportionately target Black men, and has evolved to disproportionately target other people of color and people in poverty. At EMO we believe government and social order should be founded on principles of human dignity, political equality, and is responsive to the needs and aspirations of all human beings. We believe punitive punishments, such as incarceration or financial burden, are not an appropriate response to a public health issue. Drug addiction needs to be handled by health and care providers. **EMO urges you to be on the right side of history and stop the overincarceration of people struggling with substance abuse. Vote NO on HB 4002 and any bill pushing recriminalization.**

Thank you,
Lorena Ambriz