

If someone is struggling with addiction, you should help them...right? Republicans and Democrats in Oregon think we should punish them.

The Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act, known as Measure 110, was passed in 2020 with the approval of 58.5% of Oregon voters. This policy is meant to decriminalize small-scale possession of illicit drugs as well as expand access to drug treatment. In 2021, Senate Bill 755 was passed, establishing Behavioral Health Resource Networks (BHRNs) which are meant to provide integrated care to support people who use substances.

In the years since Measure 110 was passed, people in Oregon have grown increasingly frustrated with the policy. Many Oregonians blame Measure 110 for an “increase in public disorder, drug use, and overdose deaths.” While it is true that Measure 110 has made the drug addiction crisis far more visible, given that people using drugs are no longer being picked up for using, the widely held belief that Measure 110 has resulted in an increase of overdose deaths is not true.

Despite the facts, Democrats and Republicans in the state are both considering recriminalizing drug possession, with Democrats proposing House Bill 4002, which will make possession of small amounts of drugs a misdemeanor. The bill also has provisions that would give people caught with drugs an opportunity to meet with a service provider in exchange for their criminal convictions or charges being dropped. Republicans are also offering an alternative bill that “includes stronger penalties for possession, a requirement that a person seek treatment to avoid criminal penalties, and the dismantling of the citizen commission that distributes grant funding under Measure 110.” It is important to note that the citizen commission includes folks with histories of substance use and is centered on prioritizing historically underserved

communities; in short, Republicans are actively proposing to stifle those voices and communities.

Overall, both proposals share the same goal: to make addiction a crime.

There is overwhelming evidence that criminalizing drug possession “contributes to stigma, deters people from seeking voluntary health services”, and creates barriers that follow people through the rest of their lives. These barriers include getting a job, accessing housing, and qualifying for loans. Moreover, it separates families, with the person being incarcerated sometimes being the only support their spouse or children have. Additionally, there is evidence that “in the first two weeks after their release from prison, individuals are almost 13x more likely to die from an overdose than the general population.”

The impacts of HB 4002 would also disproportionately impact rural communities in Oregon, with almost half of people in rural areas who used unlawful drugs being in prison or jail within the last six months. In other words, HB 4002 would exacerbate an already flawed system of incarcerating people struggling with addiction instead of taking a healthcare-centered approach.

Additionally, putting people in prison is expensive with the cost per day of Adults in Custody (AICs) being \$140.87 – this is what Oregon tax dollars would be paying for rather than supporting people's access to treatment and recovery, which Measure 110 pays for largely using Marijuana Tax Revenue.

Measure 110 was passed and implemented on an ambitious timeline, during a global pandemic. Consider the impacts of COVID-19 on adequate policy implementation, decision making regarding funding allocation, and the fact that “major systems changes typically take several years to implement.” Additionally, providers also will need time to “hire and train new

staff, purchase equipment, make necessary changes to their facilities, and possibly in some cases, purchase or lease new facilities” once funds are distributed.

Measure 110 isn't perfect, but it does approach addiction as a healthcare issue rather than a crime, proposing that drug addiction and overdoses in Oregon be addressed using evidence-based practices, such as harm reduction and increasing access to recovery services. While implementation of Measure 110 has been a challenge, there have still been successes, including that over 16,000 people have accessed services using funding from the policy, with 60% of the services accessed being harm reduction services.”

It's understandable that some Oregonians feel frustrated with the visibility of the drug crisis in Oregon, which often correlates with living outside or using on the street. But I urge you to consider approaching this public health issue with empathy rather than resentment. I ask you to consider the facts laid before you today and join me in supporting Measure 110.

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