



PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFETY & JUSTICE

**Submitted to the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response
February 7, 2024
Testimony in Opposition to HB 4002**

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Kropf, and Members of the Joint Committee,

For the record, my name is Andy Ko, and I am the Executive Director of Partnership for Safety and Justice (PSJ). At Partnership for Safety and Justice, we advocate for public safety and criminal justice policies that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both. For 25 years, our work has promoted public safety with policies that keep families together, reduce racial disparities, and invest in communities across Oregon.

Partnership for Safety and Justice opposes HB 4002, which would recriminalize the possession of drugs. Efforts to criminalize drug use have always been enforced disproportionately against Black, Brown, LGBTQ+, low-income, and other historically marginalized groups. There is no reason to believe that recriminalizing people suffering from addiction now will have a different outcome.

There is an addiction crisis happening in our state, with visible suffering on our streets understandably rising as a pressing public concern. It is well understood that lack of affordable housing, lack of treatment and supportive resources, and the lack of preparation for the foreseen rise of fentanyl use are the major contributing factors.

It is also true, according to evidence-based analysis completed by thinktank RTI International, that decriminalization of people suffering from addiction played no significant role in these or other harms faced by drug users, including overdose and related fatalities. States adjacent to Oregon have had almost identical negative outcomes without having ever decriminalized drug possession.

These [recent nonpartisan reports](#) recognized these facts and **recommended against** any return to criminal penalties for those struggling with addiction, pointing out that Measure 110 is one of Oregon's very few existing responses to the widespread use of fentanyl and other drugs. Measure 110 was not the *cause* of the challenges Oregon currently faces, it is a solution.

We know from the failed War on Drugs and recent history that any decision to recriminalize people struggling with addiction will not solve our addiction crisis, much less our housing and treatment crisis. Adopting such policy choices and tactics will more predictably both drastically

increase racial and income-based disparities and overburden Oregon's public safety, judicial, and public defense systems.

Measure 110 represents a needed shift to a health-focused response to addiction. After little more than one year of full rollout of the funding for Behavioral Health Resource Networks (BHRNs) established by Measure 110 have reported that [tens of thousands](#) of Oregonians have benefited from this healthcare-based approach to addiction. OHA has also announced 300% gains in the uptake of key BHRN interactions.

Our coalition is clear that the true solutions to our current crisis are essential investments in: the continuum of care, creating and expanding successful peer outreach and mobile crisis programs to help move people into housing and services, and ensuring that law enforcement and service providers work together to connect people to services is the direction that our state should head. None of these programs or services need to operate with a criminal penalty hanging over someone's head.

Thank you for your attention to the needs of Oregon's vulnerable individuals and communities.