



February 19, 2024

Senate Human Services Committee  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 1547**

Dear Senator Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, and Members of the Committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,000 supporters statewide.

**The ACLU of Oregon opposes Senate Bill 1547.** Oregon's addiction crisis, and particularly its impact on Oregon youth, is a devastating policy failure that results from decades of underinvestment in prevention, treatment, and recovery services. The State must do more and do better by its people and especially its youth. SB 1547, however, is not the way forward.

Oregon's adolescent addiction crisis is long in the making. In 2008, a multi-agency report identified "adolescent treatment" as a "top area of need" in an assessment of Oregon's addiction services.<sup>1</sup> In the years following, report after report highlighted this glaring failure.<sup>2</sup> Yet today, Oregon possesses only four facilities—and 42 inpatient beds—for Oregon youth needing substance abuse treatment.<sup>3</sup>

The ACLU of Oregon stands with Disability Rights Oregon in asking lawmakers to take action to meet the true problem and to **fund the services Oregon youth so desperately need.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Department of Human Services, Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs, Governor's Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs, Oregon Prevention, Education and Recovery Association, *Oregon Speaks: Community Addiction Services Investment Strategy*, 2008, [www.mentalhealthportland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Oregon-Community-Addiction-Services-Investment-Strategy-2008.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthportland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Oregon-Community-Addiction-Services-Investment-Strategy-2008.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Emily Green, State inaction left Oregon teens vulnerable to fentanyl's fatal spread, *The Lund Report*, March 7, 2023,

<https://www.thelundreport.org/content/state-inaction-left-oregon-teens-vulnerable-fentanyls-fatal-spread>.

<sup>3</sup> Silverman, Julia, Fentanyl Killed Isa Wilde at 15. His Mother Wonders if Changes in Oregon Law Might Have Saved Him, *Oregonian*, Feb. 4, 2024, at

<https://www.oregonlive.com/health/2024/02/fentanyl-killedisa-wilde-at-15-his-mother-wonders-if-changes-in-oregon-law-might-have-saved-him.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Sickinger, Ted, How Oregon Failed to Pay for the Mental Health System It Needs, *Oregonian*, Jan. 21, 2024 (identifying only \$35M in spending on community mental health beds from 1991 to 2018) at



Senate Bill 1547 does not address the heart of the problem which is insufficient treatment and related services for youth. Instead, it simply expands when youth can be involuntarily committed. According to healthcare providers and researchers, this is an ineffective and dangerous practice; forced treatment does not result in high long term success rates and has been associated with increased overdose risk.<sup>5</sup> Also, given Oregon's immense dearth of services, SB 1547's tactic of forcing treatment on youth not asking for it is likely to result in these limited services being taken away from youth who are asking for help.

Oregon youth who *want* treatment already experience waiting periods of upwards of a month to access the care they need.<sup>6</sup> These long wait times risk missing the narrow windows of opportunity when youth are asking for treatment – which is when treatment is, by far, the most effective.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, lawmakers must focus their attention on expanding youth treatment so that all young people who want help can get the prompt, immediate, and effective care they need and deserve.

We thank the Committee for their care and attention towards Oregon's lack of addiction services for adolescents and implore you to center expansion of voluntary treatment, prevention programs, and services across the continuum of care for Oregon adolescents. Please vote no on Senate Bill 1547.

Respectfully submitted,  
Emily Hawley  
Senior Policy Associate  
ACLU of Oregon

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<https://www.oregonlive.com/watchdog/2024/01/oregon-knew-it-needed-more-mental-health-beds-yet-then-umbers-barely-budged.html>

<sup>5</sup> Hadland et al., Evidence-Based Treatment of Young Adults with Substance Abuse Disorders, 147 *Pediatrics* S204 (2021(suppl.)), at <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/147/Supplement2/S204/34555>.

<sup>6</sup> Silverman, Julia, Fentanyl Killed Isa Wilde at 15. His Mother Wonders if Changes in Oregon Law Might Have Saved Him, *Oregonian*, Feb. 4, 2024, at <https://www.oregonlive.com/health/2024/02/fen>

<sup>7</sup> Werb et al., The Effectiveness of Compulsory Drug Treatment: A Systematic Review, 28 *Int'l Drug Policy* 1, February 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4752879/>; see also Paseranu et al. Mental Distress Following Inpatient Substance Use Treatment, Modified by Substance Use; Comparing Voluntary and Involuntary Admissions, 17 *BMC Health Serv. Res.* 5, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5210285/>.