



SO Health-E

Advocating for Health Equity

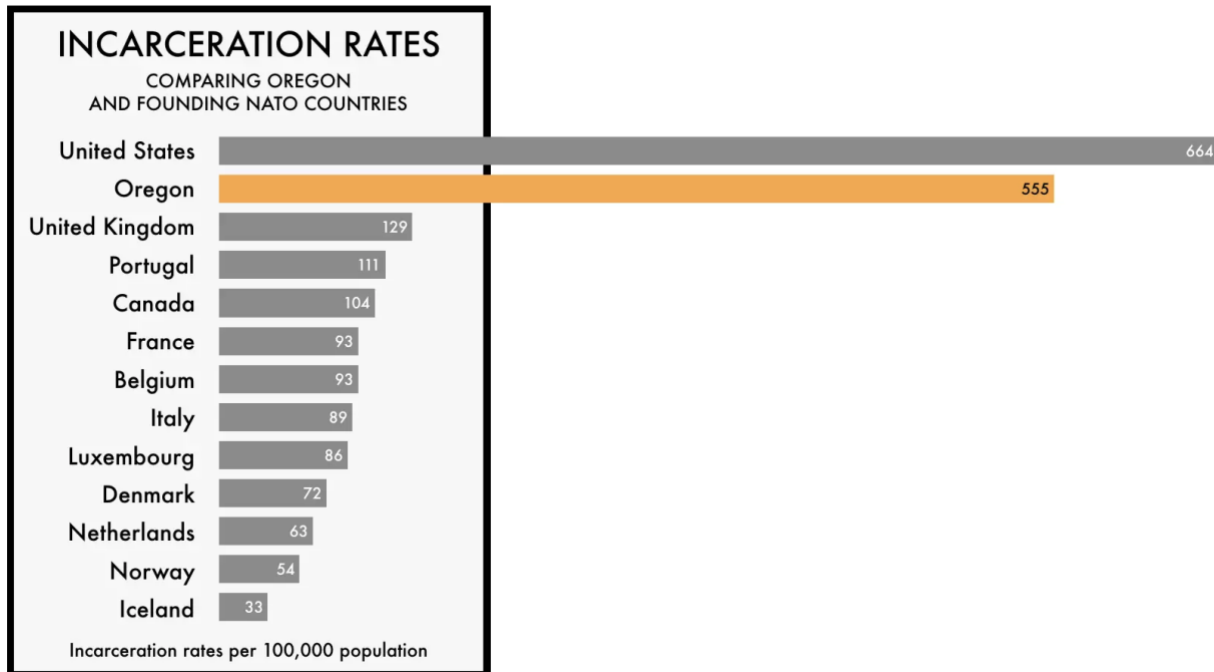
February 26, 2024

Re -1 and -24 Amendments HB 4002: Invest in Treatment, Not Criminalization

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

We all agree on the urgent need to address the crises of addiction and overdoses. And we owe it to our communities and future generations to focus on solutions that actually solve problems and save lives.

If criminalizing drug possession for personal use was effective in preventing addiction, connecting people to treatment, or preventing overdoses, Oregon would have solved these problems over the last 50 years of failed war on drugs policy. **Instead, as of 2021, Oregon had more adults in custody than any other**



founding NATO country including Canada, the United Kingdom, France or Italy.¹ At the same time, Oregon has been struggling with rising substance use disorder rates, lack of treatment capacity, and rising overdoses since 2015 fueled by deadly Fentanyl. **And many who seek community-based treatment still face barriers to access.**

¹Prison Policy Oregon Profile 2021: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/OR.html>

Southern Oregon communities cannot afford to go back to regressive, expensive, and harmful drug policies.

- We don't have the state funding for *both* expanded treatment and for expanded criminalization.
- Enforcement and incarceration are expensive for taxpayers *and* in terms of intergenerational trauma. Drug criminalization has a documented track record of disproportionately harming Black and Brown families in Oregon² due to systemic racism in spite of similar rates of drug use across race and ethnicity.³
- Those most harmed by the war on drugs, and by the overdose crisis, cannot afford more years of being targeted by police while lacking meaningful access to treatment, housing, and legal representation.

We call on lawmakers to close current gaps in funding, capacity, and other barriers to treatment before considering a return to harmful, expensive, and ineffective criminalization policies. Just one example is the nearly 3,000 adult residential mental health and substance use treatment beds Oregon needs to close gaps in today's system of care and meet the state's future demand for treatment.⁴

This is not a time to sweep people out of sight, but to end decades of underinvestment in the full range of prevention and treatment strategies that actually save lives.

SO Health-E urges lawmakers to oppose any attempt to return to harmful and ineffective drug criminalization policies and instead to continue to invest in the life saving interventions that work.

Thank you for your service to Oregon,



Annie Valtierra-Sanchez
Director

SO Health-E: the Regional Health Equity Coalition of Southern Oregon
Serving Jackson and Josephine Counties

² 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>

⁴ [Oregon Health Authority Behavioral Health Residential Facility Study 2024](#)