

Submitter: Kirsten Barquist

On Behalf Of: Oppose Recriminalizing Drugs

Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response

Measure: HB4002

As a constituent, I am deeply disappointed that our state leaders are rushing to recriminalize drugs, and I urge you to oppose HB 4002. Instead of doubling down on failed criminalization which has never worked, you should be focusing on real solutions that will actually help Oregonians.

HB 4002–24 abandons a health approach by treating drug use as a crime. Oregon judges have already warned that the courts can't handle the caseloads that will come from this flawed bill. Whether or not someone faces jail or gets connected to treatment will depend on their zip code and their ability to hire a lawyer. As a result, if it passes, the most common scenario is that people will be arrested and then released back on the street without any connection to services or treatment.

The latest version of HB 4002-24 creates massive inequities between counties. People who live in counties without a deflection program will face immediate HB 4002 arrests while people living just a few miles away will be offered connection to treatment. Your zip code shouldn't determine your ability to access treatment services. An easy fix to this would be to simply require all counties to set up deflection programs and delay criminalization until all counties do.

HB 4002-24 fails to meaningfully invest in Oregon's woefully under-resourced mental health and drug addiction treatment services. The status quo of providing just 50% of the capacity necessary to meet the substance use disorder services needed is unacceptable. People are desperate for treatment services. That's punishment enough - putting them in jail doesn't help anyone.

HB 4002-24 will do much more harm than good. It reminds me of the old saying that "the cheap fix is neither." Please don't take us backwards. Oppose HB 4002 and focus on real solutions that build a full system of care for communities -- starting with state-owned medical care infrastructure covering all Oregonians, regardless of income or employment situation (including self-employment or gig work).