

Submitter: Casey Lay
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure: SB1553

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in opposition to SB 1553-A.

I oppose SB 1553-A; especially the amendment which would make illegal drug use on public transit or near transit stops a Class A Misdemeanor.

The act of criminalizing drug possession not only adds to the societal stigma surrounding it but also discourages individuals from actively seeking voluntary health services, such as treatment for substance use disorders (SUD). This stigma further hampers the delivery of healthcare, as individuals with substance use needs often express experiencing mistreatment from service providers due to their drug use.

Further, the dangers posed by transit police to BIPOC communities are well-documented. I fear that public transit agencies, such as TriMet, will use this bill to increase policing on public transit and specifically target Black and brown communities. Relying on policing as a response to addiction is not a short or long-term solution. It is also not what our community needs or deserves.

I advocate for community-based solutions that invest in mental health and substance misuse treatment, social workers, and the disarmament of police. Safety is not just about low risk of crime or danger—it is about having access to transit without fear of harassment and intimidation. Expanding support for programs such as the Rider Ambassador Program would provide community support and rider safety, without the use of force, harassment, incarceration, or fines.