

February 26, 2024

To: Joint Interim Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response  
From: Lee Wachocki, President of AFSCME Local 2805 (Multnomah Defenders, Inc.)  
Re: Opposition to House Bill 4002 -42

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

My name is Lee Wachocki and I am a public defender in Portland. I'm here to share some on-the-ground numbers that explain why this bill won't achieve the stated public safety goals.

2,787 is the current number of unrepresented persons statewide. 173 of them are in jail. These numbers will grow if you create a new class of accused persons who need attorneys.

3-4 months is the average wait time to find a residential treatment bed for our clients. The delay is longer for clients with a mental health problem on top of addiction, which is many of our clients. You'll increase these delays even further if you try to force a new population into the already limited number of treatment beds.

3-6 months is the current wait time for the state crime lab to test material for the presence of drugs so the evidence can be used in court. You'll increase these delays if you create a new class of cases awaiting scientific testing for use in prosecution.

1,173 is the number of clients my firm represents who have been charged with crimes.

1 is the number of social workers my firm has to serve those 1,173 clients. Most of whom need a social worker to navigate the complex patchwork of scarce housing and addiction resources. I hope you plan to increase the number of social workers in my firm from 1 to anything higher than 1 if you support this bill.

3 is the number of people who resigned from my firm since the public defense reform bill passed last year. That's an improvement over past figures. But some of my colleagues will burn out if they're assigned an influx of clients in desperate circumstances: addicted in a community that lacks addiction resources. Scraping by on the streets in a city that can't meet their basic needs. Suffering withdrawal in a jail cell with no realistic plan to get them on their feet upon release.

This bill over-relies on probation officers, who are stretched too thin to meaningfully address our current clients' needs – much less the needs of a new batch of probationers experiencing addiction. Probation officers, courts, police, public defenders, and treatment providers can't be stretched any thinner.

This bill seems less like a plan to address these problems and more like a response to a threat. The threat of a ballot initiative based on a dubious poll. And a response that ignores what we learned from the failed war on drugs: you cannot arrest, prosecute, and imprison your way out of addiction.

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Thank you for your time.

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