

Submitter: Sandy Polishuk
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure: SB1553

I appreciate being having the opportunity to comment in opposition to SB 1553-A online

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.

As a frequent bus rider by choice and a Portlander, the bus is important to me. I do not feel unsafe on the bus even when weird things happen, e.g. the other evening when I got on the bus and sat in the last back row that I prefer. That's when I saw a coat on the other end of the row. I shouted out to the driver that someone left their coat behind. That's when a man crawled out from behind the sideways seat. But he wasn't dangerous! Just a guy who probably needed someplace to that a nap.

Our community is a sadder place, but that doesn't make it necessarily unsafe. We need our buses to feel save for everyone, but especially for marginalized people who need it most, people who may not have another warm place to be in winter.

TriMet and SB 1553-A suggest that their approach of increasing police and reclassifying drug use on public transit or transit stops as a Class A Misdemeanor will "give people experiencing addiction a path to help." We know, however, that incarceration and hefty fines to those who cannot pay them are not, in fact, part of a true pathway to help.

I have never noticed anyone using drugs on the bus. Once I saw someone I thought was smoking fentanyl near the bus stop, though I don't think he was even waiting for the bus. I just walked to the next stop.

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.

I believe in a safe and just transit system. Funding community resources and services, such as free public transportation, free health care, and affordable housing are directly linked to stronger outcomes for all, especially those facing the greatest disparity in the lived environment due to historical and ongoing systems of oppression. Access to resources and opportunities, such as employment, fosters safer neighborhoods because it discourages illegitimate activity.

Sincerely,