

Submitter: Sarah-Andrea Morigan  
On Behalf Of: Don't criminalize addiction  
Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety Response  
Measure: HB4002

The debate around the complex issue of drug decriminalization and its impact is multi-faceted, with strong arguments on both sides. However, the path towards re-criminalizing recreational drug use is a step backward, not forward. The case of Oregon's Measure 110 illustrates the rocky road of decriminalization marred by implementation challenges, yet it underscores a pivotal truth: Substance abuse is a public health issue that requires a health-based approach, not punitive measures.

First and foremost, I stand opposed to the re-criminalization of recreational drug use. Our history is littered with the failures of the war on drugs—a costly, ineffective campaign that has done more to inflame the issues it sought to extinguish than to provide any real solution. Re-criminalization is merely another chapter in this ineffective approach, failing to address the root causes of drug abuse and addiction.

One can't discuss this issue without scrutinizing Oregon's Measure 110. Its implementation was flawed from the start, with decriminalization taking effect before the promised funding for addiction recovery services materialized. Whether due to incompetence or sabotage, the outcome was the same: a haphazard execution that left vulnerable populations at risk. The narrative of Measure 110's implementation serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the essentiality of synchronized policy execution.

Treating substance abuse as a public health issue is the only sensible path forward. Police and jails, with their punitive infrastructure, are ill-equipped to address the nuanced needs of individuals grappling with substance abuse. This isn't just about treating addiction; it's about reshaping our societal approach to dealing with drug misuse from one of punishment to one of care and rehabilitation.

Moreover, the current model of criminalizing drug use exacerbates the overburdening of our legal system. Redirecting funds into the hiring and training of community health workers and social workers not only presents a more humane solution but is also more cost-effective. The misstep by the Portland Police Bureau, as reported by Street Roots newspaper, in failing to include the addiction recovery hotline number on citation forms is emblematic of the systemic failures in addressing substance abuse through law enforcement.

A shift away from the punishment-and-retribution model is crucial. The state must commit to funding robust, evidence-based risk reduction and substance abuse recovery services in every county. The costs of recriminalization—both financial and

social—dwarf those associated with providing adequate public health services. It's high time we reject the facile, politically expedient ""solutions"" that only serve to exacerbate the problem.

The half-measure of decriminalizing drugs without legalization has indeed perpetuated problems, most notably the persistence of the narcotics black market. This black market, without the checks and balances of regulation, has ushered in dangerous substitutes like fentanyl, contributing to a surge in overdoses. A regulated market could mitigate these risks, providing quality-controlled substances, cutting the ground from under criminal syndicates, and opening additional revenue streams for the state.

Lastly, the racial and economic justice dimensions of drug policy cannot be overstated. The long-term impacts of criminal records on housing, education, employment, and for non-U.S. citizens, the risk of deportation, are profound. A shift towards a health-based approach to drug policy could significantly mitigate these disparities, promoting a more equitable society.

In conclusion, Oregon's Measure 110, despite its flawed execution, sets a precedent for a much-needed national conversation. We must move beyond punitive measures and embrace a health-centered approach to substance abuse. The cost of inaction—or worse, regression to re-criminalization—is too high. It's time for a paradigm shift.