



February 26, 2024

Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Opposition of HB 4002-24

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

My name is Amanda Elmer. I am the Communications Coordinator at the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon), and I provide this testimony as a representative of the ACLU of Oregon. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending and advancing democracy, civil liberties, and civil rights, with more than 27,000 members statewide.

I submit this testimony opposing HB 4002 and the -24 amendments.

This issue is very personal to me. I am the daughter of a parent in long-term recovery from substance use disorder and before my time at the ACLU of Oregon, I was a public school teacher in this state and am deeply familiar with the devastation that drug incarceration has on families. **Yes, our youth are suffering from this crisis too.** Not only are our state's young people struggling with issues like access to housing and food due to poverty, and impacts to their education due to parents or caregivers experiencing drug addiction, but many young people are becoming addicted to drugs themselves and are dying. **Like all of you, I wish to address that suffering.**

But HB 4002-24 is NOT the solution to that suffering — in fact, it would increase Oregonian suffering of all ages exponentially. This bill completely overlooks the root causes of addiction (ie: skyrocketing cost of living, homelessness, mental health care, etc.), has ignored or excluded the voices of BIPOC-led organizations and nonprofits representing and advocating for the lived experiences of our community members, and instead reverts back to failed war on drugs policies to get people experiencing drug addiction out of the sight of the privileged, rather than offering true and proven healing solutions.

Walking back on the key components of Measure 110 and making low-level drug possession a crime will not only divert tax dollars away from real solutions like treatment, but it will also funnel people experiencing drug addiction into a criminal system that is ill-equipped to handle the needs of Oregonians. That tax money needs to



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be spent and directed towards tactics that are proven effective, like increased treatment beds, increased detox centers, affordable transitional, temporary and permanent housing, mobile crisis response teams and youth drug prevention education. Inevitably, HB 4002-24 will instead spend these funds on the carceral system. **This will not help our youth.**

It has been made crystal clear that our public defense system is overwhelmed with current caseloads. Adding hundreds or even thousands of cases as a result of HB 4002-24 will only backlog cases further — harming the many people who cannot afford an attorney and victims of crimes whose cases are stalled. Families will continue to be saddled with the impacts of having a loved one awaiting drug court or burdened with the impacts of a criminal record, such as a significant loss of employment or income, housing and access to food. **This will not help our youth.**

A vote for this bill also means that there is an obvious lack of concern, and even an outright disregard for the safety and lives of our Black and brown communities, who will disproportionately be harmed through the stop-and-frisk practices proposed by this bill — which are steeped in racism and threats of police violence. Police statistically target Black and brown people more than white people, will continue to arrest and jail them at higher rates than white people, and in turn Black and brown people will be less likely than white people to gain access to our already limited treatment options. (The committee's own racial disparities investigation confirmed these biases!) This means more Black and brown families will be disrupted and forever burdened with the emotional, mental, fiscal and physical consequences of police involvement and arrest, and ultimately more overdose Black and brown deaths and suffering. **This will not help our youth.**

Of course we want to protect our young people. But we cannot use their suffering as an excuse to push half-baked, harmful and overall bad policy through the legislature in an effort to appease the voices of Oregon's most privileged communities. We need to LISTEN and INCLUDE the voices of those with direct lived experiences and continue to fund the full spectrum of mental health and addiction care so that we may address and reduce addiction overall, rather than simply pushing it behind closed doors.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Oregon vehemently advocates that you vote your conscience. NO on HB 4002-24.

Thank you,

Amanda Elmer, Communications Coordinator, ACLU of Oregon
aelmer@aclu-or.org