



February 27, 2024

Co-Chairs Kate Lieber and Jason Kropf  
Members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response

VIA: OLIS

Re: Support for HB 4002 -33 Amendment

Co-Chairs & Members of the Committee:

As you know, Washington County is the second largest county in the state of Oregon by population, with over 600,000 people residing within the County. Since 1990, the county's population has nearly doubled in size, most recently our population has grown at a rate equivalent to 19 people moving in every day. This growth has made us one of the most rapidly growing and most diverse counties in the state.

In our work as the public health provider and as a public safety provider for the county, we are also concerned with the impacts of the increased substance use disorders suffered by individual members of our community as well as its impact on our broader community. In any reform to how the state and county are addressing this ongoing crisis, our goal is to keep all members of the Washington County community safe through a combination of approaches to the prevention of, treatment for and recovery from substance use disorder.

In reviewing the proposed amendment to HB 4002 and the accompanying proposed "Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Investments" package of financing, many portions meet the needs and goals of Washington County and will assist us in approaching addiction treatment and recovery through best practices. We support the -33 amendment as it centers county expertise in treatment programs if we volunteer to participate in programs that deflect and divert people out of the criminal justice system. This reflects a step towards our goal for greater collaboration between the state and county and exhibits trust in county public health and behavioral health programs to create the needed local solutions and reduce redundant programming.

The call for public safety agencies to work in partnership with our Community Mental Health Provider system and streamlining the process by running it through the county will help us work in a collaborative and effective manner with all the experts and service providers. This is what we call our One Washington County approach – making sure that all the needed pieces are in place to accomplish the primary service outcomes. As the Board of County Commissioners in Washington County, we know that our law enforcement service providers need the tools to create a path to accountability, and our behavioral health providers need to be the ones responsible for providing addiction treatment. The

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flexibility to create these programs in a manner that allows for partnerships between law enforcement and treatment providers is a core process goal for the County.

However, there are parts missing in this proposal that are needed to help us meet the shared goal of assisting people with substance use disorder using multiple paths to recovery. First, there must be long-term, sustainable levels of funding to implement deflection programs. We have experienced biennium over biennium of commitments to fully fund additional work, but we have been met with flat budget levels over the same time period, even as costs to serve increase. The lift that is expected to cover the increased costs falls onto local budgets to cover, but we do not have sufficient flexibility to modify our revenue streams to cover increased costs. **If the state's funding level does not keep up with the cost of these programs, the County will need to opt-out of services.**

Second, one of the driving concerns that Washington County has raised over the last few years in the space of addiction treatment is the need for increased investments at all levels of behavioral health workforce development. The inclusion of the United We Heal Medicaid Payment Program and higher education opportunities are a good investment – if the program can be expanded to help all community mental health providers across the state. However, we need to close the gap of available workforce through multiple measures, including making it simpler to transfer licenses from one state to another so that we can recruit from outside the state into our programs. We need ongoing investments in programs that add peer counselors and credentialed professionals throughout the state. We appreciate the flexibility to use deflection program funds to work at the local level include in the -33 amendment, but we will continue to need statewide investment to keep making progress on finding qualified staff to do this work.

We still need additional resources to fully fund the construction and startup of our Center for Addiction Triage and Treatment (CATT) and, given that it is a shovel ready project that will significantly increase facility capacity in the County, we hope to see it included in the funding package. But as we grow our physical capacity to serve this population by building the CATT, we are mindful of the staffing needs of all our programs to provide services from acute treatments to the supporting services that keep people housed, employed and connected. Without more options for growing our licensed and unlicensed workforce, we will continue to struggle to meet community needs. We are hopeful that the studies into these workforce issues will help, but there is a clearly established gap in the number of individuals needed to provide services now and into the future. We hope that the legislature can find short-term solutions in this session to help us assist our communities without waiting for final reports from the task forces that would be established under this legislation.

As a county we recognize that there is a potential for disparate enforcement of drug-related crimes and recognize that the work that the Criminal Justice Commission will take on in collecting data will be vital to understanding the demographic impacts that these changes in law are having across the state. As the

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county works in partnership with the state on this data collection, we look forward to the creation of simple, implementable systems that do not create significant new workloads for our public safety service providers.

We are committed to continuing and enhancing the work we have been doing to increase access to services throughout the community for those facing substance use disorders if we receive the needed funding. We support efforts to find more pathways to treatment in a manner that will help those that work through their addiction and into recovery find long-term stability and the ability to move through their treatment and back into stable housing and employment. **We need investments from the state legislature to cover the costs of these new programs and the additional work that our expert staff and providers will take on in creating trauma-informed, data-driven and culturally responsive recovery treatment programs.** Your continued, sustained investment in this work is vital and necessary to make our work possible.

We will continue to work with you through this session to ensure that the funding that is provided is enough to start effective programs in a timely manner as we continue to grow our services and facilities in Washington County. We greatly appreciate your leadership in crafting effective policy solutions and recognize that the long-term financial commitment of the state will be crucial for this partnership to be successful. We look forward to strong collaboration as we focus on the work ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kathryn Harrington', written in a cursive style.

Kathryn Harrington, Chair

On behalf of the Washington County Board of Commissioners

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