



February 28th, 2024

Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 98301

RE: JCACSR Testimony in Opposition of HB 4002-24

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

My name is Ray Wallace and I use they/she pronouns. I am the Policy Support Associate at the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon. Our organization is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights of each civilian that are protected within the restraint of our constitution, including the Oregon State Constitution. I am providing testimony in opposition to HB4002-24 as well as all amendments to HB4002 that criminalize in any way, user-level possession of banned substances, force treatment on people, or now or in the future lower or divert funding from treatment, housing, and related services.

I have lived in Oregon most of my life with ancestors who have been here since the beginning of the 1900s; with a long history of addiction. I am the first generation on this side of my family to attend college, as well as to break the cyclical cycle of alcohol and nicotine dependency. There is no doubt in my mind that my access to education, healthcare, and getting out of poverty, is why I do not struggle in that capacity. In my freshman year of college, I would have the privilege of taking Jurisprudence, a course often not offered in undergrad, and by all technicalities, was a senior course. This would be my first real education around issues of critical race theory, feminism, queerism, and class. That class changed my life. It finally explained to me why when I called the police on my dad when I had been 18 years old for only 2 weeks, the cops would do nothing. There were no laws protecting me because the law is not designed to protect, it is designed to wield power. Pursuing this course changed my entire projection of education and work. It led me to work with victims of sexual assault, victims of domestic violence, and deeply question my relationship with white supremacy. I sought to learn better and do better and it was/is hard, self-actualizing work.

In 2020 Oregonians demanded through Ballot Measure 110 that our state address the crisis that we are seeing on our streets and within our homes. In 2022 Oregonian passed Ballot Measure



111 making access to healthcare a constitutional right. This committee has a duty to uphold the laws agreed upon by its constituents and not be swayed by voices with large pockets.

Despite the 300% increase in services regarding addiction, our state is only at 50% capacity to meet the needs of our communities; with Hooper Detox turning 200 people away each month. We are also seeing M110 citations being handed out to Black Oregonians at 2x times the rate of white Oregonians.

My dad struggled with addiction until his passing in 2023. In that same year, my uncle would die from alcohol withdrawal syndrome, and his son to date is still in and out of rehab. I have an aunt who is 10+ years sober and her husband is too. I have been impacted by this issue deeply and am asking our legislators to believe us when we say criminalization will only make this issue worse.

Washington State reported that only 37% of people experiencing homelessness are also dealing with addiction and that addiction is not causing homelessness, but the experience of being homeless is causing addiction. Have you ever slept outside on the streets? What would you do if you could eat enough food to keep your blood properly circulating? When we will stop acting like addiction is a character flaw and now a deep failing of our government to meet the needs of our loved ones.

This body has a duty to uphold what Oregonians have voted for, which is access to healthcare and folks dealing with a disability to not face our legal system for non-victim crimes. Crimes that are deeply rooted in the cycling of Black bodies into our prisons and jail system. No one has a right to deny someone access to healthcare, and our state has a constitutional right to uphold that care being not only accessible but affordable. Investing in the addiction crisis is not something to be debated. It is something that constituents have demanded year after year. Addiction is classified as a mental health disorder and despite that, there are laws all across our country designed to further harm and shame folks dealing with a disorder that is deeply rooted in shame.

Discussions around addiction in our state have a clear racial impact and will deepen our unjust relationship with Black Oregonians. The state should be prioritizing rewriting it's wrong and recriminalization is many steps away from that necessary goal.