



**Testimony for the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response  
Hearing: February 26, 2024  
Submitted By: Andy Ko, Executive Director of Partnership for Safety and Justice**

**Criminalizing People Suffering from Addiction is Our Fundamental Problem. It Has Never Been the Solution.**

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Kropf, and members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony regarding House Bill 4002 and our state's response to the needs of Oregonians suffering from addiction. For nearly 25 years, Partnership for Safety and Justice has been advocating for public safety and criminal justice policies that ensure accountability, equity, and healing for people convicted of crime, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both.

There is no question that the Legislature is responsible for addressing both the needs of people suffering from addiction and the community safety concerns of all Oregonians. However, HB 4002, as passed out of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response, restores the fundamental *barrier* to effective responses to drug use and addressing racial injustice in our state: the criminalization of tens of thousands of Oregonians suffering from addiction.

With HB 4002, our efforts to effectively address drug addiction in Oregon will again be forced to focus on reducing the harm of our state's decision to not adequately fund direct responses to addiction. Future policy making will require consideration of reforms and dramatic investments in lifesaving services that, unlike criminalization, directly address the needs of drug users, including:

- **Harm reduction programs** to prevent drug overdose, overdose death, and disease transmission, including harms tied to the prevalence of fentanyl in current drug markets.
- Expand the **full continuum and diversity of programs** that address addiction, from medication assisted treatment (MAT) to appropriate application of both inpatient and outpatient treatment, to juvenile and culturally appropriate programs, and other services and prevention programs that respond to the many and diverse reasons that people use drugs.

- Policies that **eliminate racial, ethnic, and linguistic disparities** in both the provision of services for drug users and their treatment by the criminal justice and immigration systems.
- **Peer outreach** to connect drug users to available programs and support systems, including housing.
- Legislative and agency review and revision of **policies that protect drug users and former drug users' ability to access essential services, including housing, and thrive in their communities.**

All of these programs and services have been dramatically increased under Measure 110.

We should all be clear that the supposed “failure” of Measure 110 and the long-needed decriminalization of people suffering from addiction is the product of a disinformation campaign waged by groups seeking political and economic advantage – to the detriment of the most vulnerable populations and our state. That our state is once again engaged in a political struggle that will slow efforts to effectively prevent the many real harms of addiction – to individuals, families, and BIPOC communities – is a tragedy for all Oregonians that must be addressed.

We look forward to contributing to the correction of what we believe are missteps in the conception and compromises inherent in HB 4002 and its return to criminalization of these most vulnerable Oregonians. Thank you.