

Jon Epstein

Testimony in support of HB 2929

March 19, 2025

Co-chairs Kropf and Prozanski, members of the Committee, I'm Jon Epstein and I'm here in support of House Bill 2929.

Last week we spoke about the urgent need to strengthen Oregon's primary prevention muscle. Thank you, and special thanks to Rep. Kropf, Sanchez, and Walters for bringing those valuable bills forward. House Bill 2929 is a vital component of making what we discussed last week into a reality. Here's why:

In seeking to duplicate the success of Beaverton's fentanyl education program state-wide, the glaring lack of responsibility & authority for primary prevention became clear. It was made more evident in the work of the group referenced by Rep. Walters last week.

Our group reviewed the state's primary prevention challenges and found them to stem from a significant lack of vision, concern, leadership, planning, & accountability. We met with multiple states with opposite outcomes from ours, all with clear and aligned actionable youth and prevention plans being driven in coordinated fashion across multiple agencies and departments, reported against regularly. We also found transparent and effective processes for primary prevention funding allocations and tracking of them. Most importantly we found in these states with both youth and adult outcomes significantly better than Oregon, a prevailing concern for and culture of prevention underpinned by the idea that without preventing, reducing, and delaying substance use the pipeline of harmful use and addiction will always be full.

The group prioritized shoring up our structural deficits over all other ideas since we knew that simply throwing scarce resources into the existing structure absent a thoughtful plan, accountability, or proven concern for the topic would only result in what we have today: light treatment, lack of coordination, little follow through and questionable fidelity to the stated intentions of dedicated upstream investments.

The aims of reducing stigma, improving our justice system, and closing the treatment gap brought to the forefront by M110 are vital, but center primarily on adults currently in the throes of addiction. An upstream focus on our youth's needs and upstream prevention efforts has been mostly ignored and cut out of the dedicated funding stream, to our lasting detriment. As we discussed last week, this is hardly a fully "health focused" approach.

So, we've had a polarizing debate that left little air for much else, coupled with the reality that there isn't one statewide group actually seeking to do the necessary **"and also"** work of aiming upstream to prevent, delay, and reduce substance use.

There is an exception however. This ADPC has stepped forward into the arena where no other group has, with a vision and commitment to holistic and balanced policy and plans, to transparency and accountability, with a deep concern for youth. It is a refreshing dose of right-minded leadership.

Their vision, listening and thoughtful deliberation, expert primary prevention committee, detailed planning activities, and bias towards action show us they deserve the responsibility and authority that they are asking for, that the state needs. We should trust them to deliver. Passing HB 2929, HB 2502, 3321, and 3375 enables this.

One final point: Given existing statute proved insufficient to enable Oregon to uphold its sacred responsibility to our youth and their futures amidst policy experiments and influence from commercial and various other interests, it's critical that this legislation calls for ADPC's plans to explicitly include youth and prevention components, and that these plans be reported against regularly to the Legislature. As a great real-time example of ADPC's commitment to all the things I've described here, they sought public feedback on the introduced bill, listened and agreed with these important ideas, and I'm thrilled to say I see them in the -1 amendment filed today.

I respectfully request your 'do-pass' vote on HB 2929 and the other youth-aimed bills with all due urgency. Thank you for your commitment to Oregon's youth, and thus our future.