

Submitter: Brian Knap
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1573

I strongly support Senate Bill 1573. As a resident directly impacted by these programs, I urge you to put children first and pass this legislation.

Children Must Come First

Our first responsibility as a community is to protect our children. Schools and childcare facilities should be safe spaces where we maintain drug-free environments. Children walking to school should not navigate around individuals using drugs, discarded needles, or drug dealers who congregate where these programs operate.

The Reality in Our Neighborhood

My family lives on NW 17th Avenue. On distribution days, the difference is stark:

We observe: Increased congregation of visibly intoxicated individuals; drug dealers using the gathering as a marketplace; discarded needles and paraphernalia in yards and sidewalks; families with young children altering their routes.

In following days, we find: Used syringes in bushes, gutters, and playground equipment; drug paraphernalia scattered throughout the neighborhood; increased loitering and open drug use.

The program operators leave after hours, but we remain to clean up the mess and manage consequences. We find needles in our yards. We explain to our children why they cannot play in certain areas. This is not the community standard we should accept.

Portland's Program Has Failed to Deliver

Lack of Treatment Services: Despite claims these programs connect people to treatment, Mayor Mark Dion revealed the number one referral was for food assistance, not recovery services. There's no evidence of meaningful treatment engagement.

Mission Drift: Originally conceived to prevent HIV transmission through needle exchange, these programs have dramatically expanded. Multnomah County attempted distributing tin foil, straws, glass pipes, and "snorting kits" in 2023. The

Legislature then passed HB 2395, explicitly allowing smoking pipe distribution. We've gone from exchanging used needles to distributing an ever-expanding array of drug equipment.

No Accountability: Portland distributed 250,000 more needles than collected in 2023. Where did those needles go? Into our neighborhoods. Programs operate with minimal oversight and limited outcome data.

Community Impact Ignored: NW Portland neighbors repeatedly asked programs to relocate away from the school zone. These requests were dismissed. Programs continue operating near schools.

Addressing Proponents' Arguments

"These programs reduce unsafe needle disposal" - Yet Portland shows a 250,000 needle deficit and residents report increases in discarded needles.

"Location doesn't matter" - This prioritizes convenience for drug users over children's safety. We can provide services without doing so within 7 blocks of kindergartens.

"These programs connect people to treatment" - There's no evidence of successful treatment linkage. Food assistance referrals dominate, not recovery services.

Conclusion

SB 1573 is reasonable and measured. It doesn't ban these programs—it simply requires them to operate away from schools and childcare facilities. Harm reduction should not come at the expense of our children's safety.

I urge you to support SB 1573 and put Oregon's children first.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Knap