

Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 1583

Submitted by:

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Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Senate Bill 1583.

My name is **Nichole Hedinger**, and I serve as the **Supervisor of Peer Delivered Services at a Portland Nonprofit**. I am also a **Peer Wellness Specialist** with lived and professional experience supporting individuals navigating substance use, mental health challenges, homelessness, and involvement with multiple systems of care. My work places me alongside peers and community members during moments of crisis, ambivalence, and change; often at the exact point where trust determines whether someone engages or disappears.

I want to be clear at the outset: **those of us on the front lines have been candid about the shortcomings in the rollout of Measure 110**. We have raised concerns about delayed funding, inconsistent coordination, workforce strain, and the lack of infrastructure necessary to meet the urgency of the need. These are real issues, and they deserve real solutions.

However, **SB 1583 does not primarily address implementation gaps**. Instead, it proposes a fundamental shift in governance by repealing the Oversight and Accountability Council and moving authority for Measure 110 programs into a committee housed within the **Oregon Criminal Justice Commission**.

From a peer perspective, this matters deeply.

Peer-delivered services are effective precisely because they are **voluntary, relationship-based, and non-coercive**. Trust is not a soft value in this work; it is the mechanism of change. We know that when systems become more enforcement-adjacent, even indirectly, we consistently see engagement drop. When trust-based, voluntary engagement breaks down, people are more likely to disengage from care, experience preventable overdoses, and cycle back through emergency departments, jails, and crisis systems; outcomes that are costly, ineffective, and contrary to public safety goals.

While SB 1583 retains statutory language referencing peer involvement in screening, **language alone does not ensure meaningful influence**. Peers are not simply a referral step in a workflow; we are often the primary engagement strategy. Yet the bill does not guarantee peer representation with decision-making authority in governance, funding priorities, or program evaluation. Without that, peer involvement risks becoming symbolic rather than structural.

The bill's emphasis on behavioral health deflection also raises concern. Collaboration across systems can be valuable, but **deflection must be clearly defined as voluntary, low-barrier, and non-punitive**. Without explicit guardrails, deflection can function as soft coercion; offering support only through pathways that many people, based on lived experience, do not feel safe using.

As someone who supervises peer staff and works closely with community partners, I want to emphasize this: **peers are not resisting accountability or improvement**. We want systems that work better. We want faster access to care, clearer coordination, and stronger outcomes. What we are asking is that improvement efforts be built *with* the peer workforce and the communities most impacted, not through a shift away from community accountability toward a criminal justice-centered framework.

If the Legislature seeks to strengthen Measure 110 rather than dismantle its intent, I urge consideration of the following:

- Retain or strengthen **community-based and peer-centered oversight**, rather than relocating governance to the criminal justice system.
- Require **peer representation with voting authority** in any body overseeing funding and policy decisions.
- Clearly define deflection programs as **voluntary, non-coercive, and protective of individual privacy**.
- Address Measure 110 challenges by **repairing implementation**, not by removing community accountability structures.

Peers are already doing the work this system relies on. We engage people others cannot reach. We support stabilization in moments of chaos. We build trust where systems historically failed.

Our voices should not be an afterthought in decisions that directly affect our work and the lives of the people we serve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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