

SB 1573 Written Testimony 4-Feb-26

My name is Michelle Milla. I live in the Stadium neighborhood of Northwest Portland, and I am a parent and community advocate.

Last year, I was invited into a special legislative work session after my working class neighborhood began raising concerns about the impacts of unregulated harm reduction activity occurring in and around schools, parks, and family corridors. At the time, our focus was to be seen, to be believed, and to explain what was happening in places where policy intent met our lived reality.

What emerged from that process was a deeper understanding of a structural failure. The policies in place assumed clear standards and even distribution of impact. In practice, none of those conditions were guaranteed.

As a result, our communities have become default shock absorbers for unmanaged consequences. Families have been left to clean up biohazards on walking routes. Local businesses are still bearing economic and safety impacts. Right now, outreach workers are placed in ambiguous roles without clear siting guidance or responsibility for downstream effects. And when neighbors raise concerns, we are told that these outcomes are the price of public health policy.

That framing is neither accurate nor fair. Public health and public responsibility are not mutually exclusive. When safeguards are missing, harm concentrates. And when it concentrates, it erodes trust, fuels conflict, and weakens the systems meant to help. SB 1573 represents an opportunity to mature this policy framework. It does not dismantle harm reduction. It strengthens it by acknowledging that implementation matters just as much as intent.

Over the past two years, my community has done what neighbors do when systems fall short. We organized walks, documented conditions, met with our elected officials, and showed up repeatedly in public forums. What we lacked was a state-level framework that recognized the reality we were navigating.

We are deep in a fentanyl epidemic, and unregulated syringe distribution—without siting standards or accountability—has intensified the impacts felt all over Multnomah County and beyond. Our neighborhoods are not sacrifice zones. We need public health policy to include mechanisms for stewardship and shared responsibility. That's where public health and public safety can work in partnership with neighborhoods to strengthen Portland and create conditions where families choose to stay and thrive. Protecting our most vulnerable, whether that be toddlers, school kids, or senior citizens, begins with elected officials upholding a core responsibility of public safety.

I urge you to support SB 1573 as a commitment to aligning public health with shared responsibility on the ground. Thank you for your care and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Michelle Milla, Northwest Portland Resident