

Testimony opposing SB 1573

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the committee:

My name is Nicki Dardinger, and I am writing to strongly oppose SB 1573. For the last seven years, I have worked for nonprofit organizations in the Portland Metro Region that provide services at the intersection of harm reduction, substance use and mental health treatment, and homelessness. I currently serve as the Executive Director of a nonprofit dedicating to addressing the root causes of homelessness and poverty.

Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) are a vital component of the continuum of care for our friends, family members, and neighbors who use drugs. SSPs are much more than syringe distributors. They provide life-saving naloxone for overdose reversals to the people who need it the most, saving hundreds of lives each year. They provide referrals to substance use treatment programs, when people are ready. They connect people to housing navigators to help access housing as well as primary care providers to take care of their physical health. In a world where drug use is stigmatized, SSPs provide judgment-free, welcoming, trauma-informed spaces where people who use drugs can ask questions and be shown kindness and care. They have been proven to be highly effective at reducing the transmission of HIV and Hepatitis across communities. And they are a place where people can drop off used syringes – ensuring that they don't end up discarded on the streets.

SB 1573 would result in the effective elimination of SSPs in urban areas. The consequences would be dire. There would be less access to naloxone, leading to increases in overdose deaths. There would be an increased risk of HIV and Hepatitis transmission in communities. There would be less opportunities to connect people with housing, medical care, and substance use treatment. And with less access to safe syringe disposal sites, there would be an increase in syringes discarded in public spaces.

While this bill is portrayed as a safety measure for children, the consequences of this bill would not increase children's safety. Organizations that run SSPs select sites carefully, meeting people where they are and prioritizing places where people

who use drugs live and work. Removing SSPs won't reduce the number of people who use drugs or the number of syringes in our communities, however it would make syringe disposal less safe.

People who use drugs care deeply about their community and the places where they live. In my experience, people who use drugs work hard to keep their neighborhoods clean and dispose of syringes safely. If communities are truly concerned about unsafe syringe disposal, then the solution is to provide more access to safe syringe disposal options – making it even easier to dispose of syringes safely.

This bill will not solve our state's homeless crisis nor will it reduce the number of people experiencing substance use disorder. If we are serious about supporting people in recovery and ending homelessness, we need to fully commit to real solutions: ensuring every person has access to health care, deeply affordable housing, and the supportive services needed to be successful in treatment and housing – such as peer support specialists, case managers, and community health workers.

For all of these reasons, I urge the committee to vote no on SB 1573.