

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

I am writing to **oppose** SB 1573. I have lived directly across from Couch Park and Metropolitan Learning Center for 7 years – I can hear and see recess from my living room and Couch Park is one of my favorite things about where I live. **I urge you to not allow a years-long argument between one group in my neighborhood and one program in Portland dictate policy for the entirety of our state.** I urge you to protect our medical and social service systems at a time when we desperately cannot afford the **price** of increased HIV and Viral Hepatitis or increased emergency room visits and hospitalizations from skin and soft tissue infections. SB1573 has far reaching consequences that will impact **all Oregonians** through financial and capacity strain of our medical and social service systems.

I have worked in public health for 10 years and have been involved in local and statewide programs that include overdose response, state and Medicaid policy reform, HIV/STI prevention and testing services, and I currently work with a Syringe Service Program. While my experience informs this letter, I am writing as a resident of Oregon and not on behalf of any organization.

Expressed support for SB1573 relies on dramatic mischaracterizations of harm reduction workers and Syringe Service Programs.

- A “syringe service program” is defined by **ORS 457.757 as a program that provides services including free sterile needles and syringes and safe disposal for needles and syringes.**
- SSPs have a high burden of proof for their services – there is overwhelming evidence that SSPs **do not increase injection related litter** and that SSP participants are more likely to engage and stay in substance use treatment, reduce frequency of use, and change injection behaviors.
- SSP workers care deeply about the health of our communities, many SSP workers are parents, and we adjust our interventions according to evidence. If provided evidence that our services were harming our clients, were harming children, or increasing community exposure to disease or harm *we would change our services.*
- SSP workers are your most dedicated partners in reducing public disposal of syringes. We are the people that pick up syringes when we see them, ensure safe and accessible disposal options exist, collect and dispose of syringes from clients and community organizations, and show up to new locations where people are using drugs even when local pressure and policies rapidly change these locations. We can’t keep doing that if we are barred from going to those places.
- SSPs do so much more than provide and dispose of syringes. Between Portland SSPs alone, we offer naloxone access and training, wound care, supplies to prevent and treat disease transmission, supplies to prevent and treat skin and soft tissue infections, HIV/STI testing, referrals to substance use treatment, medications for substance use disorder, peer support services, counseling from mental health providers, transportation and nutrition support, community support groups, housing navigation, crisis intervention, connection to primary care, and more.

For an urban area, even a 1,000 feet restriction from a school or licensed childcare facility effectively ends mobile operations. 2,000 feet is more than a third of a mile. Due to neighborhood pressure, the SSP in my neighborhood moved their operations. We have so many examples of effective, good-faith partnership in the face of compounding crises, inadequate systems of care, and cascading threats to our social safety net. I believe our state and local leaders have options to mediate this local issue that do not include harming and costing communities statewide.

SSPs do not encourage drug use. We structure our services for people on their worst day and do everything within our ability to make sure it's not their last. Because we are there with people on their worst day, they often share their best with us too. We encourage treatment. We help create care options that our clients can actually access and help get them in the door.

It is really important to have someone to go to on your worst day. For most of us, when we can't get to that person they will come to us. I beg you to not stop us from showing up.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Courtney Kenney