

March 14, 2021

Dear Chair Prozanski and members of the Senate Committee On Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation,

My name is Deirdre Kanzig and I am an elementary school educator in Oregon, as well as the mother of an adult child who is affected by a drug use disorder. I am very grateful that Oregon voters have made it clear that our neighbors and family members struggling with the disease of addiction need more medical care and community support, rather than more jail cells.

Like many citizens who are challenged with chemical dependency, my son has underlying brain chemistry diseases that cause him to experience chronic depression and anxiety. When he was a teenager, I found it extremely difficult to get him the counseling he needed for his mental health and even fewer resources to help him with his self-medicating practices and eventual drug addiction. I recall finding a full syringe in his bedroom and trying to find help. Not knowing where to turn, I called the police and they told me if I brought the substance into them that they could not guarantee that my son wouldn't be charged with drug possession. I was wanting information and intervention, not criminal charges, so I ended up emptying the syringe in the woods and discarding it in a public trash can. They did not even steer me to any community resources. Surely we can do better than this for parents who are trying to get assistance and do what is right.

Over many years, getting my son help became a part-time job, (on top of my regular full time job)...tracking down doctors who could prescribe buprenorphine/naloxone, finding a psychiatrist in our rural area, waiting for 4-8 weeks to get into inpatient dual-diagnosis treatment centers, untangling the ongoing insurance nightmare, coping with the stressful financial strain, and braving the social stigma. Two other children of mine had severe autoimmune diseases. It was a stark contrast between the abundant medical and social resources available to me for those two children, compared to the sparse and lonely journey with my son suffering from the substance use disorder. I was tenacious, very resourceful, and had the privilege of having medical insurance (though we still paid extremely high out of pocket costs). I can only imagine how impossible it must be for less advantaged families. It should not have to be an insurmountable mountain to climb to get help for families and individuals impacted by addiction. Remember, this is a disease.

As a public school teacher, I see the devastating consequences to children and their families when substance abuse goes unchecked. Poverty, neglect, crime, incarceration, and fractured families can result. In 2019, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission found that our treatment system is only serving 10% of the need. It is imperative that the communities across our state readily provide affordable and prompt services to families in distress. When families are in crisis, we are all as a society negatively impacted.

With the passage of measure 110, we finally have the opportunity to come together and problem-solve as thoughtful, caring Oregonians. We can't afford to continue to have a critical, self-righteous "us vs. them" attitude that demonizes the disease of addiction, stereotypes those affected, and justifies making it a low-budget priority. With proper funding and implementation of resources, we can revitalize our communities, keep families whole, and help to save lives. These are benefits that positively impact all Oregonians.

Please support funding for these critical life-saving community services that voters approved last November in Measure 110.

Thank you.
Sincerely,
Deirdre Kanzig