

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Ian Johnson. I am a legal worker and homeowner in East Portland. Originally, I supported Measure 110 just because it seemed like a good idea--a sensible, compassionate step towards providing medical treatment to those in need, while keeping people who pose no danger to others out of our penitentiaries. My understanding of this issue grew far deeper, though, one night last December. What I saw that night showed me that implementing Measure 110 is not just a good idea, but a matter of life and death.

While exchanging holiday gifts with a friend at his apartment, I heard a woman outside scream, "He's not breathing! What's the address here?"

My friend and I went to investigate and found his neighbor lying on his kitchen floor, with cyanotic lips, no pulse, and his young son standing over him, asking what was wrong. Having grown up in a drug-ravaged town in Southern California, I knew what was happening. I've seen people O.D. before.

My EMT certification had expired nearly ten years ago before that night, but no one else was in any position to help.

I put the boy to work making me a rescue mask from a ziplock bag--more for the sake of distracting him from what I was about to do than for any hope it would protect me from a coronavirus risk--and I started compressions. I don't know how many minutes I spent there performing CPR, but his heartbeat and breathing returned before the fire department arrived and revived him with Narcan.

My friend's neighbor is alive and well today. But I will never forget the look on his son's face as he watched his father's life slipping away on the kitchen floor, or the feeling of his ribs breaking under my hands while I prayed that my half-remembered training from 2009 would be good enough.

I'm glad I was able to help that night. But I know that both of us caught a lucky break. Until our state adequately funds recovery programs, saving a poor, working father may only provide temporary reprieve. Addiction is a chronic illness and a public health crisis that demands a consistent, coordinated effort to address. People recover, but few can do it alone. When someone says by word or action, "I need help," we should believe them and give them the support they need. Otherwise, we have failed them.

Today, every time I step over a needle on the street, I wonder how many of my neighbors won't catch a lucky break--how many little boys or girls will watch their parents die because we didn't act? How could Oregon explain to these children that the state would let their parents die for lack of treatment? That they died for the sake of an 18-month process?

I implore you to implement Measure 110 with all due haste.

Sincerely,
Ian Johnson