

While there is little argument that drug addiction can be harmful to not only the users, but also their families and their surrounding community, there is still disagreement on how best to address addiction. Oregon's Measure 110, passed in the November 2020 election, is a strong step in the correct direction, moving away from a "War on Drugs" approach that has never been effective to a harm reductionistic approach, with a focus on treatment and prevention and separating drug use from criminality. SB 755 takes the principle approved by the voters in Measure 110 and establishes steps for implementing what the public has agreed is a better way to deal with the harms of drug abuse.

SB 755 is consistent with scientific studies of decriminalization policies that have proven effective in both reducing harmful drug use, separating drug users from criminals, and a cost-effective approach to reducing the harms of drug use. While Oregon remains a pioneer in such efforts within the United States, there is ample evidence from Portugal, which decriminalized drug use and possession for use in 2001, that it is an effective policy. Other jurisdictions have introduced less extensive changes, which also improve the situation. Measure 110, buttressed by SB 755, is a path to making peoples' lives better.

Thank you for attending to my testimony, and I hope this legislation passes.

James P. Kahan, Ph.D.
PCP, Precinct 4103, Multnomah County Democratic Party
Portland, Oregon

Disclosure: I am a policy analyst who led a RAND Europe project to design the evaluation of the Portuguese decriminalization effort to determine whether, five years into the change, it was meeting the goals it was intended to meet. The Portuguese, on the basis of our evaluation design, concluded that the effort met their goals. Our work was published in:

Beusekom, I. van, M. van het Loo, J.P. Kahan (2002). Guidelines for implementing and evaluating the Portuguese drug strategy. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Reports MR-1508/RE/AICE/FLA. February 2002.

Loo, M. van het, I. van Beusekom, J.P. Kahan (2002). "Decriminalization of drug use in Portugal: The development of a policy," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 582, pp. 49-63.