

Good morning Chair Prozanski, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the Drug Addiction Treatment & Recovery Act.

As a constituent, healthcare worker and someone who has been personally impacted by addiction, I'm writing to urge you to fund the vital, life-saving addiction recovery services as outlined in the Drug Addiction Treatment & Recovery Act. Oregonians voted overwhelmingly in favor of the new law, and its success is contingent upon you honoring their wishes.

In my line of work, I have witnessed the result of youth interaction with the criminal justice system in Oregon. Too often, the system overlooks youth who are suffering from drug addiction and places them in situations that set them up for failure. These youth end up interacting with the system anywhere from 1 to 5 years after their initial treatment program, often due to a mismatched program or a waitlist due to lack of services.

The criminal justice system does not realize that addiction is a health issue, and like diabetes, it requires compassion and attentive service. People recover every day from addiction if they are given the right tools and environment to succeed, and time and time again, Oregon has failed to support this vulnerable population.

All we need to do is look at the facts. The biggest issue Oregon faces right now is the Overdose crisis. This crisis has only been exasperated due to COVID-19, as we have seen a 70% increase in overdose deaths in spring 2020 compared to 2019 according to OHA. There are likely more that are not reported. When seeking treatment, access to drug addiction treatment in Oregon is so abysmal that in many parts of the state, there is no access to drug addiction treatment at all. To get treatment in Oregon, you generally need to have an insurance policy that will help pay for it, have enough money or credit to pay for the rest of the deposit, and have access to transportation to get to a facility, and have a facility somewhere within driving distance that treats the drug you are addicted to. Oftentimes, even that isn't enough. The wait to get treatment can be months long. We regularly see people die while they are trying to get in.

The best way we can begin to compassionately combat this issue is through the Drug Addiction and treatment recovery act. Halting arrests is just a start. We must continue to invest in culturally specific treatment programs as well as physicians and other community providers to increase our capacity to offer MAT services to our communities. We need to rejuvenate the system and utilize emerging and longstanding evidence-based practices in addiction and mental health recovery. We must highlight and eliminate the healthcare disparities that cause Black, Indigenous and Latin communities to be disproportionately affected by this crisis. By fully implementing the Drug Addiction Treatment & Recovery Act, we have an opportunity to stand up for Oregon's values of racial equity, justice and healing. We can revitalize communities, keep families whole and open up economic opportunities.