



Oregon AFSCME
Support for SB 755

March 1, 2021

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee,

Thank you, for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 755, the ballot measure 110 implementation bill and to urge you to fully fund and implement this important policy without delay.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 was one of the first organizations to endorse the campaign, through a vote of our PAC and Executive Boards when it was IP-44. Our members across public defense, behavioral health, health care and corrections saw this as an important opportunity to build much needed capacity in the more appropriate placement of treatment services, supportive housing and other substance use services over sending people to our overcrowded jails and prisons or frequenting our hospitals' emergency departments. They voted to endorse this policy because they know the way we have been doing things is ineffective, inefficient, and most importantly keeps people living in despair instead of providing them hope that things indeed can get better. They saw early on that IP-44/Ballot Measure 110 was hope put into practice by changing the way we approach addictions and substance use and ensuring people have access to the services they need.

Ending the practice of treating substance usage as a crime is the first step in making sure we are properly treating it as a medical condition. People caught committing crimes while in possession or under the influence of drugs or alcohol will still be charged with those crimes, but we'll begin to strip away the stigma of addiction and substance use as bad by ending the practice of treating it as something that should be punished. Treating it as a medical condition, no matter how many times a person receives a citation and calls the peer support line, we offer that person the opportunity to access the life saving supports and treatments that we would offer people experiencing other life threatening medical conditions.

There is a growing amount of evidence that connecting people with behavioral health and substance use services reduces recidivism. This includes the recent National Council for Behavioral Health report *Hope for the Future: CCBHCs Expanding Mental Health and Addiction Treatment* that highlighted Klamath Basin Behavior Health's work with people who had been



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arrested to connect them with services and provide assessments for determining care and treatment plan needs. These services provided through a demonstration project saved the state an estimated \$2.5 million in prison costs and reduced recidivism rates in the county. These types of connections and supports are known through a variety of programs nationally to reduce recidivism, because giving people the tools needed to address their illnesses is far more effective than punishment for them.

Housing insecurity and homelessness is often an initial barrier to accessing recovery services. It is hard to focus on beginning the life long process of recovery when you lack the stable foundation that secure housing provides. AFSCME members across a variety of sectors point to housing supports as the very first need that should be addressed for all of the services. One member who has worked in housing support services with a few agencies shared with me how in her time doing street outreach work to move people into housing, she only had two people who were able to get sober and connect with services before being set up in housing and all others needed the safety and stability of housing before beginning the steps toward recovery services. Supportive housing also helps address making sure that the person is able to further reduce continued complications of missed court dates and lost paperwork or additional charges that too often come without a place to call home. We must support the programs that can quickly connect people to housing and should not delay investments getting out to them.

Oregon AFSCME looks forward to these continued conversations on how to best implement SB 755 and we urge you to implement and begin to fund programs without delay.

Respectfully,

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