

**Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110  
Implementation - SB 755  
Karen Meurer and Harry Olsen, PHOENIX Rising Transitions  
March 1, 2021**

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Chair Prozanski, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

For the record, my name is **Karen Meurer**, and I am the executive director of PHOENIX Rising Transitions, a Portland-based nonprofit working with people as they transition from prison to the community. And my name is **Harry Olsen**. I am the founder of PHOENIX Rising Transitions and a Certified Peer Recovery Mentor.

We have been mentoring people coming home from prison for over 20 years, many of whom are working to overcome addiction. We have also been a practicum site for students from OHSU School of Nursing studying the social determinants of health for nearly a decade. So when they brought Measure 110 to our attention last year, our organization eagerly endorsed it and strongly encouraged our constituents to vote for it. **Today we are strongly encouraging you to expedite its implementation because Oregonians need these services now.**

The Department of Corrections has not allowed volunteers to go into the prisons because of Covid-19 for nearly a year. We are still able to work with people in the community, but the pandemic has underscored the urgency for more comprehensive availability of addiction treatment.

Fortunately, most of the men in our classes at Columbia River Correctional Institution have been released from prison since the pandemic began. But they enter a community with much greater stresses than usual. It's much harder to access services with so many closed to walk-ins and in-person meeting is severely limited or non-existent. Even so, we have still been able to connect with most and support them through mentoring and getting them the resources they need to succeed. Unfortunately, with little or no support, it's easy to fall back into addiction as a way to cope with stress.

One man we worked with had been in prison for over 20 years. He had done a lot of work on himself and was a leader in our class. He was lucky enough to get out before Covid-19 hit the prison. Unfortunately, he released into a stressful living situation and was unable to find alternate housing to support his recovery. He fell back into his addiction to cope. That caught up with him several months later, and he died from an overdose.

This is just one heartbreaking story of hope disappointed and a life lost. But Oregon is in an overdose crisis, with a 70% increase in overdose deaths from Spring of 2019 to Spring of 2020. However, with support people can and do recover from substance abuse disorder. **It is essential that addiction treatment and other supporting services be funded and implemented now so that one more family doesn't have to suffer losing a loved one.** Thank you.