



ONTARIO POLICE DEPARTMENT

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CHIEF OF POLICE

Written Testimony

Committee: Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Date: April 27, 2023

Co-Chair Steiner, Co-Chair Sanchez, and distinguished members of the committee,

I am extremely concerned about the growth and financial stability of Malheur County. The City of Ontario's Strategic Plan surrounds growth, financial stability, beautification, lifestyle, desirability, and education. City and community leaders alike are committed to ensuring all community members have an equitable opportunity to experience positive gains in these areas.

Unequivocally, today, we have more unhoused individuals suffering from mental disorders and substance abuse. Why? Is it due to Oregon having the second highest rate of substance use disorder in the nation and ranked 50th for access to treatment? Nationally, we experience \$700 billion in costs relating to crime, poor health, and lost work productivity from untreated substance use disorders, a chronic, preventable, and treatable disease.

Information from California Policy Lab and the LA Times found that a mental health "concern" affected 78 percent of the unsheltered population and a substance abuse "concern," in 75 percent. Is housing or treatment alone going to correct the trajectory of Ontario's strategic plan or the many other communities that have similar city or county plans? You know the answer—a definitive no. Yet, we continue to travel along a path that is not inclusive to most community members. They are ignored and I hear about it daily. For instance, HB 5019 & HB 2001 are related to housing and homelessness prevention, but how does this help rural Ontario? The assumption is we have the proper wrap around services including public works and public safety to respond to this new community of "housing." Why is there no mention of funding for public safety? We are the ones conducting "street outreach" and responding to unhoused complaints and incidents. Remember, there are two primary groups to consider, and both must be funded, planned, implemented, and evaluated differently:

- Unhoused wanting off the streets
- Unhoused wanting to stay on the streets

This is an oversimplification of the reality of this situation. Yes, there are a plethora of variables. However, what is factual is the reduction of public safety funding since BM 91 (Legalized Marijuana), BM 110 (Drug Decriminalization and Addiction Treatment Initiative), and BM 109 (Psilocybin Mushroom Service Program Initiative). The unintended costs for law enforcement response related to incidents stemming from drug abuse, mental health disorders, and the subsequent effects of drug associated criminal activity are unacceptable for cities and counties to endure alone. Malheur County, Ontario specifically, needs more funding to provide better services, as a result of poor policy at higher levels of government.

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