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To: Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
From: Tera Hurst, Health Justice Recovery Alliance
Date: February 13, 2024
Re: Opposition for SB 1553

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Health Justice Recovery Alliance, a coalition of organizations providing addiction treatment and recovery services under Ballot Measure 110. We share the concerns of Oregonians that people should be ensured safe and accessible access to public transit. As drafted SB 1553 -1 is ineffective, inhumane, and guaranteed to disproportionately impact marginalized communities. It is for all these reasons that we oppose SB 1553.

As stated in the background of the legislative [staff measure summary](#) for this bill, it is currently a Class C misdemeanor to engage in “disorderly conduct” on public transit. Adding another crime will do nothing to deter substance use on transit and will further punish people deep in the throes of addiction. Transit officers already have all the tools they need to intervene in dangerous situations; if they are not doing so, it is not because of the lack of a criminal penalty. Furthermore, currently drafted bills that consider Oregon drug policy include “step-downs” or “offroads” to allow people to seek treatment versus facing a criminal conviction. These considerations are completely excluded from this bill.

The evidence is clear that criminalization does not work, and harsh drug laws don't prevent drug use and addiction: 32 states have higher overdose rates than Oregon and all of them have harsher drug laws. Evidence shows that more punitive, criminal responses (such as misdemeanor and felony convictions) are not effective tools to deter drug use or mitigate the harm it can cause¹. Locking up people struggling with addiction isn't going to solve

¹ ([Vera. 2017](#)) ([HRW. 2016](#)) ([PEW. 2018](#))



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the problems we face. We must not go backwards and instead find new and better ways to integrate health care and public safety responses.

Additionally, M110 passed because the people of Oregon were tired of the racist war on drugs. There is a [clear pattern](#) of transit police disproportionately targeting riders of color. Transit providers are already having to address bias with transit fares, we can not let communities of color become data points with empty promises to “fix” it. Adding another avenue for officer bias will go directly against the intent of this bill to make riders feel safer. It is time that we accept that addiction is a healthcare crisis and not a public safety crisis².

We are happy to discuss any questions with the committee.

Sincerely,

Tera Hurst, Executive Director
Health Justice Recovery Alliance

² Cohen A, Vakharia SP, Netherland J, Frederique K. [How the war on drugs impacts social determinants of health](#) beyond the criminal legal system. *Ann Med.* 2022 Dec;54(1):2024-2038. doi: 10.1080/07853890.2022.2100926. PMID: 35852299; PMCID: PMC9302017.