

2/20/2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division: Oregon Psilocybin Services
Budget

Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share information on the Oregon Psilocybin Services budget, within the Public Health Division at the Oregon Health Authority.

My name is Erin Pappas and I am the Director of Services/Lead Facilitator at Drop Thesis Service Center, which is located in Bend, Oregon (Deschutes County). The Oregon Psilocybin Services program, established under Measure 109, has been a beacon of hope for many individuals seeking alternative treatments for mental health challenges. Since its inception in May of 2023, when the first services were delivered, estimates show that approximately 9,000 people have now been served by the program.

With the current mental health crisis in our country, many individuals seek out psilocybin therapy for unresolved mental health challenges, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, and addiction. The majority of clients are completely psychedelically naive and are specifically looking for a safe, supportive and comfortable environment to experience psilocybin. As both a licensed facilitator and a Registered Nurse of 18 years, I've seen countless individuals find renewed hope from their psilocybin experience, with effects lasting over a year with just one session.

As the Director of Services at Drop Thesis, I oversee an amazing team of facilitators that are dedicated to ensuring safe psilocybin services. These aren't "hippie practitioners". We are Nurses, Physicians Assistants, Retired Surgeons and Firefighters (among others) who bring a wealth of experience and a high level of professionalism to our psilocybin services. Our diverse backgrounds and unwavering commitment to client care ensure that each individual receives compassionate, knowledgeable, and safe guidance throughout their transformative journeys.

Here is the written experience of a recent client. She had just gotten out of the hospital 2 weeks prior to her session due to issues with alcoholism, which she has struggled with for the past 10 years. She truly feels this experience has changed her life.

"If I had to summarize my journey, it felt like coming out of darkness and finally feeling and seeing light again. Like a blindfold that I had been wearing for such a long time was finally taken off. Or, a dark, heavy cloak finally taken off of my shoulders.

The whole experience felt like it came in waves. The most difficult waves were when I felt like my body and mind needed to purge, needed to release, such intense feelings of sadness and

pain. I could literally feel it in the cells of my entire body and being. It was such a physical sensation that sometimes I felt like I was in the fetal position and my stomach was clenched and cramped so tight. It was exhausting and scary and dark and I wanted so badly to resist it - but a voice deep inside of me kept telling me that it was OK, that I would be OK, and that this release needed to happen. I know I cried a lot during these waves and I also feel like I vocalized the pain coming out as well (but I'm not really certain what was said out loud or what noises came out of me or if it was all internal). During most of these difficult waves, I can't recall thinking about sad, bad, or painful memories - it was just like this negative energy was trapped inside of me and I needed to let it all go, to let it all out of me.

After one of those waves, I felt like I could breathe again. And, I felt warm, and safe, and lighter. And, I just felt fully enveloped in love. There was a warm yellow glow - around me, in front of me, inside of me - and everything felt so peaceful. I remember thinking during one of these warm waves that everyone and everything is connected in that space. Not so much our bodies or individual selves but our spirits, energy, and souls. I felt like my spirit, energy, and soul was connected to all of this as well; a connection and feeling I have never felt before. It was so powerful. I felt like all there was to do, all that was important, was to love and to take care of one another. I felt connected to my ancestors, my loved ones now, nature, and every living thing. I wanted to stay in this wave. It was so beautiful. So warm. So safe. I could have stayed in that space forever.

However, the mushrooms / myself / the universe was telling me that there was more work to do; more that I needed to release and let go of. I'd go back into a difficult wave of purging and releasing again. It was so incredibly difficult and painful - but at the same time that beautiful voice kept telling me to continue on, that it was OK, and that I would make it through this. It's hard to put into words how it feels to be in pain and be scared and be sad, while at the exact same time feeling protected, and loved, and strong. I know that during one of these difficult waves, memories of the two abortions I've had in my life (one in college and one right after college graduation) came up. I hadn't thought about that in years. I felt intense sadness and guilt, but I could see these tiny angel babies in the glowing yellow light and I just knew that their energy and souls and spirits were OK and taken care of and still a part of my own energy and soul. We were still together in this universe. We were still connected.

I felt the love of my husband and my family in the room with me during my journey - it was palatable. I especially felt the love and comfort of my dogs. During the difficult waves I felt like they were all in the bed with me - curled up and all cuddled around me. I could actually hear the jingling of their collar tags and didn't need to open my eyes to know they were there and were helping to support me on the journey I was on. I have always blamed myself for the death of my beloved dog Posey. One evening her stomach was extremely bloated and I was very worried about her. I wanted to take her to the emergency vet immediately, but my husband and I decided to let her sleep through the night and see how things looked in the morning. She passed away that night and we woke up to her lifeless body. I couldn't accept that she was gone, so I rushed her to the ER vet. There was of course nothing they could do. I stayed in the room with her sweet soul for hours until my husband finally made me come home. I just didn't

want to say goodbye; I didn't know how. There was a moment in my journey where she came to me. It was just her and I in this beautiful white space. Everything was white and so bright, except for her and I. It was breathtaking - like I literally had a hard time catching my breath and breathing because it was just so beautiful. And so peaceful. And everything was OK. I could feel her love and energy emanating from her and being shared with me. And, it was like she showed up, we showed up, in this beautiful place at exactly the right moment. I felt forgiven and I felt her energy binding with my own. She only stayed a little while but the experience was perfect and breathtaking and exactly what I needed to continue on my journey and ride out the waves that I knew were still coming. It was like she was my guide - giving me permission, love, and strength to keep moving forward.

There were also times that didn't feel like intense waves of doing difficult work or enjoying a wave of peace, love, and safety - but just times where I was talking with myself. My whole life has been about living up to certain expectations, making other people happy, or trying to control everything around me. I've always wanted everyone to like me and for them to see me a certain way. I've always felt like I'm playing a character in my life and have no idea who I truly am without the masks I wear. This all seemed so ridiculous and funny to me during my journey. I remember cracking up because during one of these talks with myself, I was trying to control how I thought about control (if that makes sense). It's like I was trying to micromanage my journey and it just felt so ridiculous and funny. I felt like the mushrooms gave me permission to just let go of all of that; that it was just so silly and unimportant in the grand scheme of things. So what if someone doesn't like me? So what if I just say "no" because I simply don't want to do something? So what if someone has certain expectations of me? It was like a revelation. I get to decide who I am, and what I want to be, and it's OK if others aren't on board with that. I've been an alcoholic, an overachiever, a people pleaser, and someone who hides what I'm really thinking and feeling so as to not upset others. I'm not going to do that anymore. I may not know who I truly am just yet - my authentic self - but this experience made that feel OK. And, it made all of the effort I put into acting a role or playing a part just seem so ridiculous and something that I didn't need to worry about doing any longer. I felt love for myself and for the person I'm going to become.

The waves of painful and beautiful moments continued on, I have no idea for how long because time just didn't seem to exist. It was just the now and the present moment that mattered. At a certain point, everything just kind of calmed down and felt easier and all I could see was this beautiful yellow path and light in front of me. I felt the warmth and glow of this yellow light throughout my being. It completely enveloped me and it was so damn peaceful. But, I couldn't seem to take a step forward on the path itself. I was basking in the warm, safe glow and my heart, soul, and every fiber of my being felt OK and happy and grateful and so loved. Just emerging into this light was HUGE for me -- coming out of the darkness and into the light. And, I think it's OK that I couldn't yet step forward on the yellow, glowing path towards the brightest part of the light. I think my journey was showing me that there is just so much beauty in front of me that I just haven't experienced yet. But, it's there for me now - and I want to keep doing the work to travel along that beautiful golden path.”

This is but one of the MANY incredibly healing experiences that I have had the honor to facilitate in the short time that the State of Oregon has so graciously allowed psilocybin therapy to be in existence legally. With the mental health crisis we are currently experiencing in our country, I am so grateful that Oregon is on the forefront of exploring alternative therapies that are helping our citizens and truly making a difference in the lives of our constituents.

However, less than two years in, the Oregon Psilocybin Services program is still in its infancy. As the first-of-its-kind, programs like this need time and support to reach their full potential. Importantly, 2025 will be the first year there will be access to comprehensive data on the program thanks to Senate Bill 303, passed in 2023. Major research initiatives studying the impacts and outcomes of psilocybin services are also underway; this information will provide invaluable insights into how psilocybin services can be optimized to address mental health care in our State.

This year, the Oregon Psilocybin Services (OPS) program is at a pivotal moment. A \$3.5 million shortfall within the OPS budget threatens to undermine its ability to provide equitable access to care, which would double licensing fees. My goal since taking this role at Drop Thesis has been making this treatment as accessible as possible for those in our community, but for service centers with \$10,000 licensing fees, doubling that amount is not a change that could be absorbed. This shortfall threatens to undermine Measure 109's core promise to deliver state-regulated psilocybin therapy, and the state's leadership in mental health innovation. At the same time, House Bill 2387, the Psilocybin Services Program Improvement Bill, offers a path forward to strengthen the program's foundation, improve client safety, and better integrate psilocybin services into Oregon's healthcare and behavioral health systems.

In the coming year, psilocybin therapy is likely to play a stronger role in supporting Oregon's goal to decrease mental health and substance use disorders, but without your support, this innovative mental health initiative could falter before it has the chance to fully demonstrate its impact. I urge you to champion funding for Oregon Psilocybin Services for the program at this important juncture in the program's Development.

Oregon has the opportunity to lead the nation in addressing mental health challenges with compassion and innovation. Let's give this program the time and resources it needs to establish itself as a model for others to follow, and honor the will of the voters to make this program a success.

Sincerely,
Erin Pappas
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