

Testimony of Pam Pearce

My name is Pam Pearce. I am submitting testimony in support of House Bill 3321 and the other bills aimed at prevention and youth. Thank you, Representative Walters, Representative Sanchez, and Representative Kropf, for introducing this critical legislation.

I am a person in long-term recovery who began using substances at 14 while growing up in Lake Oswego. I am the founder of Oregon's first recovery high school, a longtime resident of the state, a parent, and an advocate for emphasizing that a strong primary prevention infrastructure is the solution, as early substance use is often a pediatric-onset illness that can be prevented—and science backs this up. I strongly support **HB 3321**, **HB 2502**, and **HB 3375**, and I ask that you do as well.

As a parent committed to protecting my children from the dangers of early substance use and fully understanding the genetic factors and science behind substance use disorders, I feel overwhelmed every day by the urgent need for improved primary prevention services. It is essential to recognize this importance as the first step in the continuum of care, providing the most critical and comprehensive support for youth in Oregon. Our state continues to face a significant substance use crisis that threatens and undermines systems such as public health, safety, and the economy. Tourism and key industries cannot prosper amid declining community well-being, and any further inaction will only hasten this decline.

Once proud of its high livability rankings, Oregon's substance use crisis continues to erode our state, consistently placing us at the bottom of many assessments and rankings vital to our overall health and livability. The state has relied on reactive measures for too long, prioritizing short-term fixes over effective, long-term prevention solutions. Numerous discussions and task forces have identified issues and proposed remedies, yet meaningful action is both lacking and long overdue.

Families are stretched thin, schools lack adequate resources, and systems and infrastructures designed to help are overburdened, leaving far too many without the essential resources and support needed to avoid or overcome substance use. The promise of progressive policy must be matched by decisive action. We must rebuild trust in our systems and help our young people thrive—an investment that ensures everyone's well-being.

Real Prevention, Real Solutions

We must recognize that early substance use is not merely an individual issue—it impacts entire communities, from overburdened families to struggling local industries. By prioritizing individual autonomy over collective well-being, Oregon has inadvertently placed less emphasis on public health and substance use prevention. This imbalance has led to record-high rates of substance use and fatalities, with youth being particularly vulnerable.

A strong foundation for reversing Oregon's decline begins with a statewide commitment to preventing substance use before it starts. Thank you for your leadership and for advocating these measures:

- **HB 3321**: Developing and implementing a **statewide primary prevention strategy**—coordinated, clear, and focused on stopping substance use before it takes hold.
- **HB 3375** and **HB 2502**: Ensuring a **comprehensive assessment** of youth substance use prevention, screening, and intervention. They also support invaluable programs like **recovery**

high schools, which help students recover from substance use while succeeding academically and socially.

- **HB 2502, HB 3321, HB 3375**, and ultimately **HB 2929**: Strengthening the role of the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission by requiring **distinct and regular reporting** on youth-focused services and primary prevention efforts. This added transparency and accountability are crucial.

If these bills are merged, I respectfully request that the definition of primary prevention remain strong and that explicit youth and prevention-focused reporting requirements be included as a distinct pillar within **HB 2929**. We must not weaken our commitment to a strategic, evidence-based approach—one that addresses substance use at its roots.

The Time to Act

Oregon now stands at a crossroads – it must reconcile its values with practical needs, demonstrating that integrity lies not just in what is said but in what is done. The time has come for decisive action, implementing prevention strategies thoroughly discussed and widely agreed upon by many leaders and the like in Oregon. It is time to restore public trust in our systems. This is the long game, and it needs to be prioritized.

By investing in a **statewide primary prevention infrastructure**, Oregon can:

- **Align Ideals with Practical Solutions**: Uphold progressive values by promoting health equity and addressing the root causes of substance misuse.
- **Prioritize the Common Good**: Protect the health and prosperity of all Oregonians, not just individual liberties.
- **Rebuild Community and Economic Stability**: Create a healthier environment that attracts residents and strengthens vital industries.

It is no longer enough to advocate for ideals without also taking action. Oregon's distinct values—its progressive spirit, integrity, and creativity—must guide its recovery. This requires making bold choices and investing in prevention, a proven strategy for saving lives and reducing societal costs. Our future depends on converting ideals into tangible impact.

Conclusion

By passing these bills, you will protect Oregon's youth, strengthen families, and create healthier, more resilient communities. I respectfully urge you to vote "Do Pass" and "Yes" on these critical measures.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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