

Hello Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

I am Kamryn Berk, one of the chairs of the Oregon Youth Addiction Alliance, the youth-led collaborative between the System of Care and the Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission.

I have had the opportunity to live in various cities and settings across this country — from growing up in the suburban hills of Beaverton, to bustling urban environments in Los Angeles and New York City, to more quiet rural communities of Central Oregon, to where I currently live in Portland now — and one disturbing trend remains consistent: youth drug addiction is omnipresent, yet continues to be met with an inconsistent and neglectful approach. When I sought help for my own substance use problems that arose as a result of mental health struggles, I was not taken seriously by peers or professionals because of my age and background.

I am here to ask you to support HB 2502 to fight substance abuse among Oregon's youth in a way that actually reaches them.

Despite the state's well-intentioned efforts to manage substance use, the reality is that many of our youth are slipping through the cracks. Substance abuse can - and does - happen to individuals from all socioeconomic, racial, and health backgrounds.

I am deeply concerned that our state has not properly invested our efforts into comprehensive, evidence-based, and culturally-specific strategies to combat substance abuse, specifically for young people. We need upstream policies that prioritize information, education, and early intervention while simultaneously ensuring accessibility to treatment for anyone who may need it across the continuum of care.

With your support of House Bill 2502, Oregon can make strides towards recovery with a plan that addresses youth-focused prevention and treatment programs, increased funding for school and community-based resources, and establish the appropriate degree of emergency warranted when our youths' futures, and therefore the future of our state, are at stake.

Oregon's youth deserve better, and I hope I can count on you to help us give them that.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.