

March 16, 2025

Members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response:

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 2506, Relating to Substance Use Disorder Treatment; Declaring an Emergency. I am an addiction medicine and family medicine physician in Medford and hold a community faculty appointment in the Section of Addiction Medicine at Oregon Health and Sciences University (OHSU).

Having practiced in Medford for 20 years, I have seen the devastating impact of drug abuse on rural communities, particularly since the influx of fentanyl into the illicit drug market. My clinic, the Oasis Center of the Rogue Valley, specializes in treating families with drug use disorders and in my practice alone we have had 15 parents die in the past four years related to their drug use. These parents left behind over 30 children whose lives will never be the same. Effectively and compassionately addressing drug use not only improves the lives of citizens suffering with this disease, it changes the life course of the next generation of Oregonians.

One of the most positive initiatives in the fight against drug dependence that I have witnessed in recent years was a training program/study led by OHSU titled "Hospital-Based Opioid Treatment." This initiative provided a year of technical support and training to hospital physicians and staff on the recognition and treatment of opioid use disorders (such as fentanyl addiction), and the results in our two local hospitals were transformative. Prior to this initiative many opioid-dependent patients left the hospital without completing vital medical treatment because their drug use was not addressed. Since this program was initiated, we have seen the number of patients leaving against medical advice has plummeted and most of these patients are referred to drug treatment on discharge. This has been a sea change. It has saved lives.

Expanding this life-saving work to all hospitals in Oregon should be a priority. Oregon Health Sciences University has the expertise and the track record to meaningfully implement this work on a large scale. I have seen it firsthand.

I urge you to support HB 2506. It will save lives and help prevent the trauma of parental addiction and loss from transmitting to the next generation.

Respectfully,

Kerri Hecox, MD, MPH
Medical Director, Oasis Center of the Rogue Valley

