

Dear Co-Chairs Prozanski and Kropf, and Members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response,

My name is Todd Nicholson, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 3197. As both a person in long-term recovery and the principal of Rivercrest Academy—a recovery high school in Portland dedicated to serving youth with substance use disorders—I see firsthand how urgent and under-resourced this crisis has become for young people in Oregon.

Like many others, I began using substances before I turned 18. I know from personal experience the devastating impact that early substance use can have—and also the transformative power of early intervention, treatment, and community support. I was fortunate to find a path to recovery. Today, I dedicate my life to ensuring that young people struggling with substance use are not left to navigate it alone.

At Rivercrest Academy, we serve students who have already experienced the consequences of untreated substance use—some have dropped out of school, cycled through juvenile justice, or lost connection with their families. Yet, when given access to treatment, recovery support, and a school community that understands their needs, these same students thrive. I have seen youth go from being counted out to graduating, working, and becoming leaders in their communities.

Oregon ranks among the worst in the nation for youth access to addiction and mental health services. Our families and schools are overwhelmed, and youth treatment beds are scarce—especially outside urban areas. This is a public health crisis. And we must respond with the level of urgency and investment it demands.

HB 3197 would help provide stable funding to prevent substance use and expand treatment access for young people statewide. The cost of doing nothing is staggering—not just in dollars, but in lives lost to overdose, incarceration, and homelessness. Research shows that every dollar spent on prevention can save up to ten in long-term costs to healthcare, public safety, and productivity.

Some may be concerned about raising taxes to support this work. But the truth is, Oregon's alcohol taxes are among the lowest in the country and have not kept pace with inflation or the rising costs of addiction in our communities.

Alcohol-related harm—especially among youth—takes a heavy toll, and we must begin to treat this with the seriousness it deserves. This modest adjustment can yield enormous public good.

The Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission's Youth Strategic Plan will offer a strong, data-informed roadmap. But plans require funding. HB 3197 is a critical first step in giving our youth a fighting chance.

I urge you to support HB 3197 and invest in the future of Oregon's young people. Every child deserves the chance to recover, to heal, and to thrive.

With gratitude,

Todd Nicholson

Todd Nicholson

Principal, Rivercrest Academy

Alcohol & Drug Policy Commission –Recovery Subcommittee

Person in Recovery