

4/2/2025

Robert Sanders, In Support of: HB3197

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

My name is Robert M. Sanders, and I am writing to urge your full support of HB 3197, which increases funding for youth substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery services—including Recovery High Schools and peer-based recovery models.

As one of the few professionals working directly in youth recovery services in Oregon, I witness daily the vast gap between the needs of young people and the services available to them. Our youth are at a critical turning point, and HB 3197 represents a chance to meet them with hope, healing, and opportunity—not barriers and dead ends.

We know the facts: Most substance use disorders begin before age 18. Oregon youth initiate substance use earlier than the national average. Our state ranks among the worst in access to youth treatment and mental health services. In most of Oregon, there are simply no services at all—young people are falling through the cracks, especially when they don't have access to private insurance.

But we also know what works: Early intervention and peer mentorship reduce risk of homelessness, incarceration, and overdose. For every \$1 invested in prevention, up to \$10 is saved in healthcare, criminal justice, and lost productivity. Youth engaged in community-based, peer-led programs—like the one I represent—are showing measurable success in school, family life, and sustained recovery.

Looking at models like 4D Recovery, we've seen firsthand how empowering youth to lead, heal, and grow changes lives. Their youth recovery center is inclusive, trauma-informed, and rooted in increasing Recovery Capital—supporting young people in building social connection, self-belief, purpose, and long-term wellness.

In the last quarter alone:

96.8% of adolescents made progress on their self-determined goals.

90.3% stayed engaged in school. 83.9% reported improved family relationships.

We retained 91.6% of participants—demonstrating strong, sustained engagement.

And on average, these youth achieved over 145 days of sobriety.

While this progress is meaningful, it doesn't begin to address the needs of the estimated 38,000 youth across Oregon who are still struggling. 4D is just one part of a much larger system—and that system has been, and continues to be, drastically underfunded.

Some will argue that adolescent alcohol use is decreasing. But the reality is, Oregon ranks second in the nation in severity of youth substance use. It's not just about usage rates—it's about impact, access to care, and the depth of harm.

This bill is not just about treatment—it's about resilience. It's about investing in primary prevention programs that build protective assets like hope, connection, education, and community. It's about ensuring youth have access to mentorship before the onset of substance use—and creating a system that strengthens protective factors and affirms their potential.

My dream is to build a system where we no longer scramble to respond after a disease develops—but instead proactively create an Oregon where our next generation can dream big, feel safe, and thrive.

Oregon is at a crossroads. We can continue down a path shaped by industry profits, or we can take a stand and build a system that truly supports our youth.

My grandmother—former Governor Barbara Roberts—used to recite our state motto often: *“Oregon flies with her own wings.”* During her time in office, she fought back against Big Timber, secured reforestation protections, and ensured that youth with special needs could finally access education.

She governed with the belief that courage in policy makes a difference in people's lives.

Today, I ask you to consider: What legacy will you leave?

Will you be remembered as the leaders who responded with boldness when our youth needed you most?

Or will this moment pass as another missed opportunity—where profits spoke louder than people, and urgency was met with silence?

HB 3197 is a chance to act with vision and principle. Let it be known that when Oregon's youth needed champions, this committee stood up.

Please support HB 3197 and help give Oregon's next generation the opportunity to heal, to grow, and to lead.

With gratitude,
Robert M. Sanders