

Dear Chair Prosanski, Chair Kropf, Co-Chair Manning, and members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response,

My name is Samai Mendoza and I work at 4D Recovery as an Executive Assistant. I urge you to support HB 3197 to increase revenue for the prevention and treatment of youth substance use.

At 4D Recovery, our mission is to provide—in partnership with systems, communities, and individuals—comprehensive services that help adolescents, young adults, and families recover from substance use disorders. Our vision is a future where systems, communities, and individuals work together to ensure that all people receive the support needed to find and sustain recovery from substances. HB 3197 is a crucial step toward making this vision a reality by ensuring that Oregon's youth have access to the necessary prevention and treatment services to support long-term recovery.

Oregon lacks adequate resources to address our alcohol and drug crisis, especially for youth—untreated substance use results in harm to individuals, families, communities, and businesses. Additionally:

- Most people who develop a substance use disorder begin using alcohol or drugs before the age of 18.
- In Oregon, youth are more likely than the national average to start drinking or using substances early in their lives.
- Oregon ranks among the worst states for youth access to addiction and mental health services.
- Schools, families, and communities are struggling to manage rising mental health needs, while waitlists for youth treatment programs are long or nonexistent in rural areas.
- Research shows that for every \$1 invested in prevention, up to \$10 is saved in healthcare, criminal justice, and lost productivity.
- Youth who get help early are less likely to experience homelessness, incarceration, or overdose later in life.

- The Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission is finalizing a Youth Strategic Plan that will have options for immediate and long-term strategic impacts to address the growing crisis.

As a mother, I have become increasingly alarmed by the growing patterns of substance use, particularly alcohol, among youth in our community. It is clear to me that there is a serious gap in both prevention programs and accessible services to help address this issue before it leads to addiction. In my personal experience, I've witnessed firsthand how the pressures of adolescence, peer influence, and a lack of preventative measures can lead young people to experiment with substances like alcohol.

Alcohol is far too easily accessible and socially normalized, making it one of the most prevalent substances that youth turn to. While some may see drinking as a rite of passage or an easy way to fit in, the reality is that the long-term consequences of early alcohol use can be devastating, leading to addiction, mental health struggles, and a host of other social and emotional challenges. The services available to help prevent addiction in our youth are woefully inadequate. As a parent, I feel that my child and others in his age group are often left without enough guidance or resources to resist these temptations. We know that early intervention is crucial in preventing lifelong addiction, but without effective community-based programs, counseling services, or educational campaigns, it is far too easy for youth to turn to substances as a coping mechanism.

What worries me most is that the lack of prevention programs leaves our youth vulnerable. They are not receiving the support they need to navigate the difficult pressures of adolescence or the growing prevalence of substance use around them. I believe it is essential that we invest more in education, early intervention, and support services for families. Schools, community organizations, and parents need to work together to equip young people with the tools to make informed, healthy decisions.

Working at 4D Recovery, I see firsthand the transformative impact of access to recovery support. By investing in prevention and treatment, we not only save lives but also build stronger, healthier communities where young people have the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Samai Mendoza