



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 29, 2024

Timothy G. Sekerak
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Vote Explanation on HB 4002 A-Eng.

Dear Chief Clerk Sekerak,

Today I will be voting “Yes” on House Bill 4002, which adjusts our state’s approach to addiction treatment, rehabilitation, and community safety, in light of the devastating drug crisis that has ensnared our nation.

Over the past three years, in my capacity as a firefighter and paramedic, I have treated firsthand a greater number of overdose deaths than I have encountered in my previous seventeen, and witnessed the terrible impacts it has on surviving family members. This crisis is not limited to the streets or travelways of our cities. I have treated bodies in suburban and rural homes, sawmills, businesses, and parks. It has been - and will likely remain forever - the most difficult and tragic years of my professional career; and is still only a sliver of the incalculable scope of grief washing over the people of our state, as we lose more loved ones every single day.

I do not lay this crisis solely at the feet of Measure 110. Other states have been impacted in similar ways to Oregon, but we began this fight with less addiction treatment and recovery infrastructure in place than almost any other state in the nation, including a significant shortage of affordable housing. The funding of voluntary recovery programs is paramount to treating addiction, and I will continue to support it in this bill and those beyond, but our pathways to recovery are woefully incomplete. Our inroads to treatment are inadequate, detox and sobering centers are virtually nonexistent to pull victims from out of the throes of addiction, and only recently did many of the programs funded by Measure 110 start to come online to be able to serve those who are ready and willing to start their life anew.

Were Oregon’s pathways to recovery more robust and resilient today - the components of this bill that I find challenging or distressing would likely be enough to cause me to vote “No”. Ultimately I do not believe that criminalization of drug use is the right path for treating a healthcare issue that deserves compassionate systems of support rather than punishment. It is equally challenging when we face the realities of racial and social inequity in the enforcement of criminal penalties, as we have seen in the past and as they continue today. I am also deeply concerned by the ways we are increasing the strain on a public defense system and workforce that is already critically under-resourced.



It will be important to monitor the impacts of HB 4002 in these key areas of concern. As more people struggling with addiction are charged with possession, and there are additional workload ramifications for the public defense system, I look forward to working with the Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety to ensure we can improve access to counsel. As for all portions of this bill, it will also be critical to track and reduce any racial disparities in enforcement and the need for a public defender.

Ultimately, I hope that in the near future, when Oregon's addiction treatment and recovery infrastructure is substantially improved, we can revisit these small penalties that are being added and find them to be no longer necessary.

I would like to thank the members of the Joint Interim Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response for negotiating a path forward in an impossible situation. There is no perfect solution to be found in a wicked problem like this, but their process was robust and their efforts were earnest. They are choosing to invest deeply in improving Oregon's pathways to recovery, while using the mechanisms immediately available to us to limit the scale of death we are facing as new services continue to come online.

This is both a difficult and a hopeful day, and I want to emphasize that the conversation is not over. There are more solutions to explore, more questions to ask and be answered, and many communities desperately in need of our continued support. The work continues, and the positive impacts can be found if we remain willing to work together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dacia Grayber", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dacia Grayber
Oregon State Representative – House District 28