



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 6, 2024

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

RE: Vote Explanation on SB 1553B

Dear Chief Clerk Sekerak,

I wholeheartedly support workers organizing for safer and more just workplaces and recognize the need for safe transit systems to meet our state's climate goals. The intent of SB 1553 is in alignment with these aims, unfortunately the content of the bill is not. Time and time again it has been shown that increased criminal penalties do not provide a meaningful deterrent to those who would commit crimes, they merely serve to remove people from society. This is even more true in the case of criminalizing addiction, where we recognize that the behaviors this bill seeks to punish are the consequences of illness, not rational thought.

Just a few short days ago, this body passed legislation that recriminalized the possession of small amounts of controlled substances. While I expressed my misgivings about this decision, and my beliefs that criminalization is not the solution to the crises of addiction and substance use disorder, there was a small glimmer of hope contained within that bill. Under HB 4002, there are potential opportunities for diversion programs and offramps from the carceral system, though only in jurisdictions where the will and the financial means to provide such programs exist in tandem.

Today we heard Senate Bill 1553, a bill that would further criminalize those suffering from addiction. Again, we were presented with the opportunity to meet the crises of addiction and substance use with compassion, not convictions, care, not jail. Distressingly, the faint hope contained within HB 4002 is **conspicuously absent** from the bill we heard today. The penalties proposed in SB 1553 do not include diversion opportunities, the critical offramps for individuals suffering from addiction to avoid a cyclical journey of incarceration and recidivism. With these offramps absent, SB 1553 is primed to disproportionately impact the most vulnerable members of our community and destabilize those who need stability and compassion rather than court dates and convictions.

Because these opportunities have not been included in this bill, and because I believe that the only meaningful way to address addiction is with compassion, treatment, and care - I voted no on SB 1553. I hope that in a future session, we are able to comprehensively fund diversion programs, and universally extend those opportunities across our state.

Respectfully,

Representative Farrah Chaichi, House District 35

