



Health Department

February 5, 2019

House Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE - HR E
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 2257 - Relating to drugs

Chair Greenlick, Vice-Chairs Hayden, Nosse, and members of the Committee, my name is Paul Lewis, I serve as the Health Officer for Multnomah County. I organized the Portland metro area Tri-County Opioid Safety Coalition in 2014 and I served on Governor Brown's opioid task force for the past 2 years. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of HB 2257.

As you know the Governor's Opioid Task Force is a multidisciplinary group that includes legislators and subject matter experts plus both state and local agency leaders. The introduced bill includes a broad framing in section 1 that defines substance use disorders as chronic conditions for which treatment is accessible. This definition helps expand our views of this condition in at least three ways. First it expands the focus beyond opioids to the broader realm of chemical dependency; this includes the use of stimulants, alcohol, benzodiazepines such as xanax as well as multiple substances. Second, it brings our state up-to-date by affirming that substance use disorder is a brain disease, not a moral failing or personal choice. Finally, it states that treatment, including medical treatment, must be available and accessible to those suffering from this problem.

The major theme of the April 2018 Portland Metro Tri-County Opioid Summit was the wide intersection between substance use disorder and the criminal justice system. As the local government responsible for incarceration and the health of incarcerated inmates, Multnomah County is actively exploring and piloting projects to prevent overdose deaths and to connect offenders to life-saving recovery treatment. As part of the larger state justice system however, our efforts must be synchronized and coordinated with the Oregon Department of Corrections. This bill requires both state and local correctional facilities to make an assessment and to propose solutions that will assure continuity of addiction treatment plus accurate diagnosis and initiation of evidence-based long-term treatment.

Additional provisions of the bill will improve the quality of care for those suffering from substance use disorders through an accreditation process, will expand to additional counties the successful 'Project Nurture' which provides addiction treatment for expecting mothers who use illegal drugs. Finally, as harm reduction efforts through syringe exchanges expand around Oregon, this bill provides affirmative legal defense against inadvertent unlawful possession of controlled substances charges by those providing these life-saving and disease prevention services.

Thank you for considering this legislation and our suggested amendments. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Dr. Paul Lewis, MD, MPH
Health Officer
Multnomah County Health Department