

Jenn Morin
City of Brewer-Brewer Mayor
LD 1975

Written Testimony on

L.D. 1975, “An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs”

Presented by

Jennifer Morin – Council Chair

Brewer City Council

Committee on Health and Human Services

January 17, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

We, the collective governing body of the City of Brewer, Brewer City Council; Mayor Jenn Morin, Deputy Mayor Soubanh Phanthay, City Councilor Michele Daniels and City Councilor Dani O’Halloran. Oral testimony offered by Mayor Jenn Morin on behalf of the Brewer City Council in opposition of the passage of LD 1975,” An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs”.

The decriminalization of drug possession is not a viable solution to the current crisis we face with drug use, addiction, overdoses, homelessness, public disorder, and crime. We believe that such a public policy will only serve to exacerbate the problems and ultimately at the loss of lives through increased use, distribution, and overdoses. The underlying message of such public policy is that you can do drug whenever and where ever you want without law enforcement interference, enticing more drug dealers, and making drugs plentiful and cheap.

Oregon’s Ballot Measure 110 (BM 110) decriminalized the possession of drugs, the same as what is proposed here, and has been met with disastrous consequences. In the first two years after BM 110, Oregon experienced an annual overdose rate of greater than 61% when compared with a 13% nationwide average. Homelessness increased, overdoses increased, crime increased, public disorder increased, and social costs increased. Oregon has the distinction of having the fastest-growing youth drug death rate in the U.S. Approximately 6,000 tickets have been issued for drug possession since BM 110 went into effect in Oregon in 2021, but only approximately 92 people have called and completed assessments needed to connect them with services.

The results of decriminalization can be seen not only in Oregon but also in British Columbia. This month marks the start of the 2nd year of a 3-year decriminalization experiment, allowing drug users to carry up to 2.5 grams of heroin, morphine, fentanyl, cocaine, and ecstasy for personal use. In the first 7 months of 2023 British Columbia set a new record with 1,455 drug deaths even though the province is continuing to expand access to treatment options and counselling. Opioid involved overdoses increased by 98%, cocaine involved overdoses by 87%, methamphetamine involved overdoses by 107%, and benzodiazepine involved overdoses by 177%. British Columbia, specifically Vancouver, has previously employed safe drug testing sites and has countless safe injection facilities that have been in operation for over 2 decades. Despite these countermeasures the demand for drugs and use of same has increased, supply has increased, overdoses have increased, homelessness has increased, with crime and public disorder increasing.

We recognize that there is a serious society impact from the illicit drug economy with international and domestic criminal organizations as the profiteers, fueled by violence, littered with misery, despair, destruction, and death.

We recognize that if left untreated, substance use disorders lead to untimely deaths; those addicted to illicit drugs, such as fentanyl or methamphetamine, commit crimes to facilitate the addictions; these crimes victimize our citizens and businesses and impact the safety and prosperity of a community; it tears apart the fabric that binds families together, places children at risk, and interferes with the right to peaceful

enjoyment of public spaces for all.

We have seen a greater demand in our area for illicit drugs fueled by persons associated with organized crime because of economic opportunity. Drug overdoses are at an all-time high despite significant and needed investments in treatment and recovery resources.

We believe that the best solutions can be found by taking a pragmatic approach to an all-encompassing drug control strategy that invests in the areas of prevention education, access to treatment, support of recovery services, and enforcement. It is through a balanced approach to reduce demand and disrupt supply that we can attain a sustainable and functioning drug control strategy. Strategies such as drug decriminalization create permissiveness and a lack of accountability and are detrimental to the health and wellbeing of our community. Such policies remove any impetus to seek positive change and create a sense of apathy and angst for those victimized by crimes. They rely on an all carrot and no stick approach, something that is failing miserably in Oregon and British Columbia.

There are components of this bill that can build up a robust resource infrastructure that offers help for those wanting by removing barriers to recovery are very important and needed. We have an opportunity to craft out a comprehensive investment strategy in all realms (prevention education, access to treatment, support of recovery services, and enforcement) that can truly make a difference for all. We hope that the decriminalization of drugs will be a strategy that will be abandoned but further deliberations will focus on impactful and meaning investments.