Measure 110: We need on-demand drug treatment, now

By Stacy Chamberlain, Oregon AFSCME executive director

Drug addiction impacts millions of Americans and their families. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, roughly 20 million Americans battled addictions in 2017.

Those numbers outline a harsh reality: addictions affect all of us. Whether it's a friend or coworker, or in my case, a family member, nearly all of us have been impacted by it in one way or another.

Addiction doesn't stop with the individual affected, it has a ripple effect that touches every aspect of one's life. Relationships fall apart and stable housing and jobs are lost.

In my family member's case, they were fortunate to have access to treatment options through private insurance. Like so many battling an addiction to alcohol or drugs, they had tried to get sober numerous times. Luckily, their last effort has been successful and they now count 16 years of sobriety.

But what about the millions of Americans who don't have the same privilege and access? As things stand, for the vast majority of people, their addictions are treated as a crime instead of a medical emergency and illness.

This November, Oregonians will have the opportunity to make a change by voting yes on Measure 110.

Measure 110 would greatly expand access to drug addiction treatment and recovery services. Oregon currently ranks nearly last in the country in the availability of drug addiction treatment for those who want it. The waitlist to get treatment can be months long, and in some rural counties, there are practically no treatment services at all.

While unions have been able to successfully bargain coverage for drug treatment programs, we know it's not enough. Our corrections workers are faced with prisons that are overcrowded, in part with non-violent, low-level drug offenders. We need a system that replaces criminal punishment of addiction with an expansion of treatment and recovery services to help those struggling get their lives back on track. A prison sentence only makes things worse, saddling people with lifelong criminal records, making it harder to secure jobs, housing, professional licenses, and more.

This ballot measure replaces the current system of arresting, jailing, prosecuting, and paroling simple drug possession cases with an expansion of essential services. If approved by voters, the measure would reclassify and reduce simple misdemeanor drug possession offenses, shifting Oregon's approach to addiction from criminalizing to providing health services. To be clear, the measure doesn't legalize any drugs. Rather, it would make more treatment and recovery services available to those who need and want it. If it's not a crime, more people can come forward to get help with their addictions. Those who want and need treatment would be able to get it—not just those who have money and the right insurance plan.

Measure 110 would be funded by excess revenue from Oregon's existing state marijuana tax. Marijuana tax revenue above $45 million would go to these expanded drug treatment, recovery and stable housing services. The state estimated that when marijuana legalization was fully implemented, tax revenue would reach between $17 million and $40 million a year. It's now much higher than that.

Oregon AFSCME supports Measure 110 because it is a priority for our members both on the job and in their personal lives. We believe it should be a priority for all organized labor in Oregon. We've heard from our own members on the frontlines that more treatment—not jail—is the right approach. With this new approach, corrections employees would find less overcrowding and better staffing ratios and our public defenders and human services providers would see fewer repeat clients.

The medical community reached consensus long ago that addiction is a health issue. But in Oregon, we still treat it as a crime. 8,900 Oregonians are still arrested every year for possession of small amounts of drugs. Measure 110 will change that, and increase access to potentially life-saving care. As one of Oregon's largest trade unions, we recognize the tremendous benefit this measure would have for our workers, their families, and our community as a whole. We urge you to join us in supporting Measure 110.

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AFL-CIO releases 'Executive Paywatch' report

The national AFL-CIO unveiled its annual Executive Paywatch report earlier this summer, which confirmed the continued imbalance in the country's economy between the pay of CEOs and working people. In 2019, CEOs of S&P 500 companies received, on average, $14.8 million in total compensation. The average S&P 500 company CEO-to-worker pay ratio was 264-to-1.

In Oregon, CEOs of S&P 500 companies received, on average, $9,914,132 in total compensation. The average S&P 500 company CEO-to-worker pay ratio was 206-to-1. In Washington state, average CEO pay was $12,634,369, with a worker pay ratio of 207-to-1.

Washington's Satya Nadella of Microsoft's was the highest paid at $42,910,215. Starbucks had the highest CEO-to-worker pay ratio with an astounding 1,675-to-1 ratio after CEO Kevin Johnson raked in $19,241,950 versus median worker pay of just $11,489 in 2019. Oregon's highest paid CEO in 2019 was Nike's Mark Parker at $13,968,022 in total compensation.

The report found the pay of S&P 500 CEOs increased, on average, $3.4 million over the past 10 years, while the average U.S. production and nonsupervisory worker's pay increased just $8,360.