



Massachusetts Bill H.1913/S.1117: An Act Relative to Treatment, not Incarceration

Alexandria Drake, University of Puget Sound

Dear Chairs Day and Edwards and members of the Joint Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dr. Alexandria Drake, providing expert testimony in support of advancing S.1117/H.1913 - An Act Relative to Treatment, Not Incarceration. I am an Assistant Professor of Public Health at the University of Puget Sound, teaching graduate-level courses in the Master of Public Health program. I am also the Director of the Health Equity Research Laboratory and have spent over a decade working in public health, with a special focus on substance use and medications for opioid use disorder research. Over the last 7 years in particular, I have engaged in local, state, and federal-level research on access to drug treatment, served on regional substance use workgroups, and volunteered in harm reduction community outreach.

I am writing this testimony to express my support for Bill H.1913/S.1117. Scientific evidence emphatically shows that **prioritizing continued access to treatment** for substance use disorders **saves lives**. In 2024, nearly **9 Massachusetts residents died every day** from a substance-related death. While not all these deaths would be individuals on probation and parole, it shows the extreme impact that substance use has in Massachusetts. Access to treatment is one of the most powerful tools we have to prevent unnecessary deaths and life disruptions from substance use.

The road of long-term recovery can be tumultuous, and access to interventions, especially medication-based treatment, **dramatically reduces the likelihood of substance use recurrence**. However, I want to note that substance use recurrence is a normal and, quite frankly, often an expected part of the long-term recovery process. Recent studies have found that more than **60% of individuals recovering from a substance use disorder will resume or return to substance use** at least once within one year of starting treatment. A recent study from 2019 also showed that **it took an average of 5 attempts** (with a range of 0-100 attempts) to no longer use drugs or alcohol during the recovery process.

What I want to emphasize in this testimony is the important and essential role H.1913/S.1117 plays in making sure individuals are not further punished during their long-term recovery process through things like violations of probation for a positive drug or alcohol test. In these moments, people need support, compassion, and redirection, not more sanctions.

To conclude, I would like to urge you to pass S.1117/H.1913 to prioritize access to treatment during a person's legal process with probation, parole, or other court-ordered interventions.

Thank you,

Alexandria Drake, PhD, MPH

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