



700 N. Killingsworth Street, Portland Oregon 97217 – [www.uniteoregon.org](http://www.uniteoregon.org)

September 26, 2016

Dear Joint Judiciary Committee of the Oregon House and Senate,

My name is Kayse Jama, and I am the Executive Director of Unite Oregon. Unite Oregon is statewide social, racial, and economic justice organization. I was a member of the Task Force who worked to create what became HB 2355. HB 2355 did two very important things - it created a structure to eliminate profiling by law enforcement, and it reduced felony drug possession to a misdemeanor. We felt that this was a necessary step to take after learning of the severe racial and ethnic disparities that impact our communities of color, who I believe have been subjected to overfelonization for the possession of small, personal use amounts of drugs. I was surprised to learn how many Oregonians are becoming felons solely because of drug possession. These are the people who are not committing other felonies or, in some cases, committing any other crimes at all. Unite Oregon is committed to the idea that addiction should be met with treatment and not only with punishment, especially a felony level punishment that can take away a person's housing and employment, and especially when we have good reason to believe that these very serious penalties are falling disproportionately on communities of color.

The Criminal Justice Commission has studied the impact of HB 2355, and I am pleased that the news is good. As a result of HB 2355, we are no longer overfelonizing low level drug possession, and racial and ethnic disparities have narrowed. While this is progress and we should certainly applaud the parts of the state that have made the most progress in eliminating disproportionality in the criminal justice system, I believe it is also fair to ask why the disparities were so pronounced to begin with.

I also want to remind the committee that the reforms we have made to drug policy, while important, only cover one small corner of the criminal justice system. If disparities are happening with drug offenses, we have good reason to believe they are happening elsewhere. The second half of HB 2355, which will provide us for the first time with comprehensive information about who is being stopped by police, doesn't come on-line for another year. Our work to root out disparities is not over, and while we should take time today to acknowledge our progress, much work remains to be done.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kayse Jama".

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