



KATE BROWN
Governor

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HB 2257 Testimony
February 5, 2019**

Chair Greenlick, Vice Chairs Hayden & Nosse and Members of the House Healthcare Committee:

I am honored to present my Opioid Epidemic Task Force 2019 legislative package—House Bill 2257.

This comprehensive legislation will once and for all declare Substance Use Disorder to be a chronic illness in Oregon. Frankly, this declaration is long overdue. In March of 2018, I signed Executive Order 18-01, declaring addiction to be a public health crisis in Oregon. I took this step because addiction and recovery is an issue that unites us all.

This summer, I had the chance to visit my uncle. He was the youngest of my father's brothers and we have not spent much time together. During the visit, my uncle reminded me of my family's story. My grandmother Lois was a nurse and my grandfather was a doctor. He was brilliant, but he struggled with drug addiction most of his life. They separated, living apart for many years and leaving my grandmother to raise their four young sons alone. Living on nurses' wages, it was terribly difficult for her; a constant and exhausting struggle to make ends meet. But, she never stopped thinking about her sons' future.

Those four little boys kept her going. Mostly by her own example, she instilled in them the importance of self-reliance and hard work. She taught them that education was the key to a better life. All four boys finished high school, went on to college and served in the military. Three became doctors and one became an engineer.

Many of you may have heard me tell this story. But, it wasn't until last summer when my uncle shared with me just how hard their lives were that I came to this realization:

Even though my dad and his brothers went on to lead successful lives, it's clear that 40 to 60 years later, the course of my family was steered by addiction. Our lives are shaped by dealing with the aftereffects of my grandfather's addiction and how my grandmother managed. My uncle's children's lives were shaped by it, as were his grandchildren's.

Mine was too.

HB 2257 represents a leap forward, stating with finality that Oregonians consider Substance Use Disorder (SUD) to be a medical problem that requires a medical solution. We must destigmatize addiction once and for all.

House Bill 2257 is the result of a bipartisan and bicameral, consensus-based effort. I would like to thank Senator Steiner Hayward, Senator Linthicum, Representative Williamson and Representative Brock Smith for their tireless efforts on the task force during the interim. We could not have accomplished this without their commitment and expertise.

There is so much to be excited about in this bill. While all of the provisions are sorely needed, I have to make special mention of those expanding addiction and recovery services for pregnant persons suffering with SUD—a model that has been proven effective by Project Nurture. The recommendation for expanding this program came from the Opioid Epidemic Task Force working collaboratively with my Children’s Cabinet during the 2018-19 legislative interim.

This cutting edge programming pairs patients with peer mentors that are dual certified as doulas. Doulas, of course, provide nurturing guidance and support for expecting mothers during pregnancy. The combination of this approach with peer-mentorship means that mothers are doubly supported and set up for success. We know that SUD is one of the root causes of family separations and kids ending up in the foster care system. Project Nurture applies a health lens by walking hand-in-hand with expecting mothers through the entire pregnancy. The program does not stop at delivery. New mothers and babies are supported for an entire year by receiving parenting classes and other key family support.

The results speak for themselves: 93% of program participants retain custody of their infants after graduating from the program. Parental substance use disorders are the largest driver of foster care placements in the state of Oregon. If we can replicate the success of Project Nurture across the state, we can take less kids into foster care and keep more families safely together.

Last year, I put forward my Substance Use Policy Agenda as part of my “Action Plan for Oregon.” My stated goal was to improve the health of Oregonians struggling with substance use by becoming a model state for prevention, treatment, and recovery. House Bill 2257 places us on the path toward achieving that goal. In addition to the aforementioned provisions, we’re providing for immediate access to treatment, supporting our provider community and working to destigmatize the disease of addiction.

We must break through the barriers of shame and stigma to provide the best treatments possible first and the most effective assistance now. This means providing better access to treatments that set people on a recovery path that works for them. Oregonians suffering with substance use disorder deserve our best and this comprehensive bill is an important step in the right direction.

Thank you for your support.