



July 10, 2024

To: Multnomah County Chair Jessica Vega Pederson  
From: Portland Metro Chamber  
Re: Implementation of county deflection system  
CC: House Bill 4002 Implementation Executive Team:  
District Attorney Mike Schmidt  
District Attorney Elect Nathan Vasquez  
Portland Police Chief Bob Day  
Gresham Police Chief Travis Gullberg  
Multnomah County Sheriff Nicole Morrissey O'Donnell  
Multnomah County Presiding Judge Judith Matarazzo  
Multnomah County Judge Michael Greenlick  
Denise Pena  
Grant Hartley  
Rachael Banks  
Janie Gullickson  
Fernando Pena  
Fletcher Nash  
Abbey Stamp

The Portland Metro Chamber (The Chamber) is greater Portland's Chamber of Commerce and represents the largest, most diverse network of businesses in the region. The Alliance advocates for business at all levels of government to support commerce, community health and the region's overall prosperity. We represent more than 2,300 members, from 27 counties, 13 states and virtually every industry sector. More than 80% of our members are small businesses.

We write today to communicate the regional Portland business community's concerns with the implementation of the county's drug addiction deflection system and express our core values and priorities that will address these concerns. We transmit this letter today after reading the recent news stories about the current direction the deflection leadership team is taking, meeting and dialoguing directly with you and your senior staff, and gathering input from members of the county board, public safety leaders, and legislators. We understand that all counties are being asked to implement the new deflection system on an urgent timeline, and like all new systems, it will not be perfect on day one. However, we have gathered enough detailed information to have deep concerns that the current direction is not consistent with the intent of House Bill 4002 and will repeat errors that the county has made in the past several years with implementation of other treatment facilities and programs.

The Chamber backed HB 4002 from the outset of the 2024 legislative session after extensive and detailed dialogue with the bill's chief sponsors. Our support was secured after receiving the strongest possible commitment that the bill would come with \$25 million in funding for a Multnomah County 24/7 first responder drop-off sobering center following the [recommendations developed by County Commissioner Julia Brim-Edwards](#). Commissioner Brim-Edwards' plan was based, in part, on best practices from other jurisdictions that have already implemented successful and transparent sobering and treatment systems.

We have deepening concerns that the county deflection system will be an endless run around the intent of HB 4002 and the Brim-Edwards sobering center plan; will be out of alignment with the rest of the region and will simply continue the ongoing lethargic county response to the interrelated fentanyl and homelessness crises we see on our streets every day.



With this background in mind, we strongly urge you to consider the following as you continue to design and implement the county deflection system and sobering drop-off center.

**1. Deflection and 24/7 sobering should be implemented simultaneously as a single integrated system**

While we understand that the county must meet a legislative mandated September deadline for the initial launch of the deflection system, we are concerned with several comments by county officials that suggest that deflection and sobering are being viewed as bifurcated rather than integrated systems. It was even suggested that the 24/7 drop off sobering center may be delayed for two years or more due to deflection implementation requirements. The 24/7 drop off sobering center and “treatment readiness center” (as named by Chair Vega Pederson) should be one and the same. The county can and must do both at once, adhering as closely as possible to the rapid implementation timeline stated in the 24/7 drop off sobering center plan submitted for review to the board of commissioners in April 2024.

**2. Treatment Readiness Center must not repeat the mistakes of the Downtown Behavioral Health Resource Center (BHRC)**

The county simply cannot open the Treatment Readiness Center without an operational plan in place to minimize the external impacts of the facility, including a good neighbor agreement with the nearby businesses, property owners, and residents. The county opened the BHRC in 2021 with no plan, and even a complete lack of understanding of its own legal responsibilities, for managing the exterior of the facility. Making matters worse, the organization selected to oversee BHRC operations contractually excluded external management of the facility. The immediate exterior and the surrounding blocks of the BHRC rapidly became the epicenter of drug dealing, which ultimately resulted in an open fentanyl market that extended to SW 4<sup>th</sup> and Washington. We credit the county with eventually collaborating with Downtown Portland Clean & Safe and other downtown stakeholders to remedy the situation on the streets, but this took over two years and literally millions of dollars in both time and resources. We want to communicate in the strongest possible terms that the Chamber will OPPOSE the opening of this new facility until a transparent external operational management plan has been approved.

**3. Multnomah County’s deflection system must require registration, tracking, and accountability**

Based on the information available thus far, we are deeply concerned that the Multnomah County deflection policies and practices will be completely out of alignment with the rest of the Portland region, including Clackamas and Washington County. The deflection system should be a tri-county regional system with few to no policy and practice gaps, otherwise we will continue to see disproportionate impacts of hard drug addiction in Multnomah County. The county would be best served to not try and do it all itself and develop a system with shared accountability across and between counties, police and other first responders, the criminal justice system, treatment providers, and the individuals entering the system. There must be clear limitations and county alignment on the number of times an individual can be “deflected” before going to jail. Otherwise, it will just be an ongoing revolving door that drains provider resources and zero accountability. Without accountability, tracking, and transparency, deflection will simply be another name for what our community experienced under measure 110. Deflection can only be a “choice” if it is paired with clear and consistent accountability as clearly articulated by Clackamas and Washington County leaders. We specifically want to express our opposition to the proposed concept of simply “meeting with a peer on the street” as acceptable deflection. This is clearly not in alignment with the intent of HB 4002 or deflection and would be completely free from accountability. Individuals who choose deflection must be required to be taken to the Readiness/Sobering center and registered into a system. This is the



only way deflection can achieve the right balance between actual deflection and accountability. We recognize that peer engagement is an effective strategy in improving safety and livability in neighborhoods and therefore insist that the use of peers be directly linked to measurable outcomes that are transparent to the community.

#### 4. Transparency with the County Board of Commissioners and the community

Multnomah County already has the [least democratic and transparent management](#) structure in the State of Oregon. And we are deeply concerned that the county Board of Commissioners have not been included in the implementation process. The exclusion of Commissioner Brim Edwards, who delivered a well-designed and broadly supported recommendation for a 24/7 sobering center, is particularly egregious. With this willful exclusion of the county board, we urge the Executive Committee to require the county staff to deliver weekly updates to the County Commission on deflection and Treatment Readiness Center implementation, including 24/7 drop off sobering, at public hearings. The deflection system must also require a public dashboard that reports deflection system data in real time to the public.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership as you implement a deflection system that we all hope will begin to help the thousands of addicted Portlanders get on a path to recovery and reduce the negative impacts that widespread addiction has wrought on our neighborhoods and businesses. We continue to offer ourselves as a partner and collaborative resource to help you succeed in this difficult and critical mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "AH", is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Andrew Hoan  
President & CEO, Portland Metro Chamber