



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

Cassandra (Cassie) Boness, University of New Mexico

Good afternoon Chairs Day and Edwards, and Members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary. My name is Dr. Cassie Boness, and I am a licensed clinical psychologist, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of New Mexico Center on Alcohol, Substance use, And Addictions, and a researcher, here to offer expert testimony on Bill H.1913/S.1117. I am here today speaking to you in my personal capacity. My primary area of expertise is addiction psychology, and I am a person in recovery from a substance use disorder. My life has also been impacted by the costs of incarceration, particularly my family members, who have been incarcerated and dealt with the lasting trauma and stigma of that experience, when they should have instead received access to treatment.

I am here today to convey my support for Bill H.1913/S.1117. This bill is aligned with the evidence on ethical and research-based practices for equitable substance use disorder treatment as well as the research on recovery. It is likely to have a **significant impact on public health** given estimates suggesting that about **50% or 1 in 2 individuals** on probation and parole meet criteria for a past year substance use disorder and research has consistently shown that community-based substance use disorder **treatment reduces both substance use and involvement in crime**. We do recover.

This bill is important because many people seeking recovery from substance use and substance use disorders will experience lapses or return to use, including those individuals on probation. For most people, lapses are a normative part of the recovery experience, even when engaged in treatment. Therefore, ensuring people are not further punished for lapses, for example by a probation violation, as described in this bill, is critical for compassionately supporting people on the pathway to recovery and long-term thriving. This bill represents an important shift away from punishment-based approaches to addiction and towards compassionate rehabilitation that supports public health.

I urge you to report H.1913/S.1117 favorably out of this committee. Thank you to those who have shared their personal experiences of surveillance, loss, struggles, and thriving today and thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.