

Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Statement on Ordinance Prohibiting Consumption of Controlled Substances in Public Spaces  
June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Portland's growing substance abuse problems have exploded to deadly and disastrous proportions.

This year alone, Portland Police Bureau has already initiated over 100 suspected overdose death investigations.

According to data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the state of Oregon ranks number 1 in the nation for adults and teens reporting an illicit drug use disorder in the past year.

This is an issue that erodes not only public health, but also public safety.

We have all heard stories of people walking down the street and finding themselves in a cloud of unknown smoke and having to seek medical treatment from what they have just unwillingly inhaled.

Additionally, needles and tinfoil often litter our sidewalks as people lay nearby, unconscious or worse.

Currently, under Measure 110, law enforcement may issue an up to 100-dollar civil citation for drug possession that can be waived if the recipient contacts a phone number for drug treatment assessment.

Since Measure 110 took effect in early 2021, thousands of these citations have been issued throughout the state but resulted in only 189 treatment assessments, and there is no other backstop if the citation is ignored.

Clearly, this is not working as it was intended to.

As we navigate these uncharted waters, we are forced to wait for better substance abuse recovery resources.

But local governments have an obligation to do what we can to protect our community now. We must focus on both public safety and public health concerns – especially in public spaces.

That is why, next Wednesday, I will be bringing to City Council a new ordinance that will address the loophole between legal possession of controlled substances and public use of those substances.

This ordinance would amend our public consumption of alcohol ordinance to include controlled substances and outline clear and familiar expectations. This is a commonsense approach.

We must make it clear that people cannot use drugs in public spaces.

I appreciate that this ordinance has support from the Portland Police Bureau and the Multnomah County District Attorney's office.

But it will take all of us working together to make the kind of systemic change our city needs.

Let me be clear, this is not a fix for addiction, nor will it be possible to change people's behavior overnight.

We ask community members not to call 911 if you see someone using drugs unless there is an urgent life or safety concern.

Importantly, neither the City nor the PPB control whether the Sheriff will allow officers to arrest offenders or how courts could impose sentences under this ordinance.

But we fully support finding alternatives to criminal punishment that can help people get the treatment and services they need.

We must acknowledge that the City and PPB do not currently have the resources to address every instance of drug use in public spaces, but we have to start somewhere.

Bolstering resources and recruitment at the Portland Police Bureau remain top priorities for my administration.

In the last year and a half, we have hired over 100 newly sworn officers, and recruitment levels continue to be strong.

We have advocated strongly and support the Governor's efforts to clear the backlog at the State Academy so those hires can finally begin their lengthy training.

This effort will take time, but we are committed to improving public safety with the resources we have while our restaffing efforts are underway.

Our public spaces must be safe for Portlanders, of all ages, to collectively enjoy.

Thank you.