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Oregon News

[Oregon's pioneering drug law raises more questions than answers in early months](#)

OPB

In February, Oregon rolled out a nation-leading experiment in its approach to drug use. After decades of punishing users with arrest and potential jail time — an expensive approach that produced inequitable outcomes for people of color — voters last year decided low-level drug possession should no longer be a crime.

It was a dramatic step sold with a promise: By treating addiction as a public health issue, the state could steer users to an improved array of treatment options without the harsh penalties and far-reaching impacts of a criminal record.

But eight months in, a big part of the system is not living up to the sales pitch.

Law enforcement agencies in many parts of the state have had little appetite to use a key component of Measure 110, a violation akin to a traffic ticket that can be dismissed if users call a hotline that can help them access treatment.

And when police do hand out tickets, they're often simply ignored.

Of 978 cases that had come before circuit court judges as of Oct. 1, more than three-fifths of defendants failed to show up for their scheduled court appearance. Similar stats have emerged in municipal courts that have also handled the new violations, OPB found.

More troubling for Measure 110's intentions, phones are sitting quiet at the special hotline designed to steer drug users toward professional treatment that might help them beat an addiction. The line has received, on average, fewer than two calls a week from people who've received tickets. According to the circuit courts, defendants have leveraged a phone call to have their case dismissed just seven times — less than one tenth of one percent of cases that had made it before judges as of Oct. 1.

"I think it begs the question: Are the citizens getting what they were promised in terms of what this measure would do?" said Reginald Richardson Sr., executive director of the state's Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission, the state agency tasked with improving Oregon's approach to substance abuse treatment and prevention.. "I think the answer is a resounding, 'Not yet.'"

Backed with big money from national groups, and facing comparatively meager opposition, Measure 110 passed with more than 58% of the vote last year and launched Oregon into a bold new era.

While the proposal's approach is not unique on the world stage, it's a novel step in a country with a history of strict drug prohibition. For the New York-based Drug Policy Alliance and likeminded supporters of drug decriminalization, Oregon was to be a proving ground that the idea could work in the United States.

The new law eliminated the possibility of arrest or jail simply for possessing small amounts of drugs like heroin, cocaine, and ecstasy. Low-level possession is now an administrative violation, punishable by a maximum \$100 fine.

[Redistricting splits county in two](#)

TheMadrasPioneer

The new district maps Oregon legislators adopted divide Jefferson County between two

DISTRICTS.

"It's weird how it was kind of wiggled through there," says Jefferson County Commission Chair Kelly Simmelink. "All county lines should have been boundaries."

Instead, the districts follow seemingly arbitrary lines.

The new District 57 takes a chunk of north Jefferson County -- the entire Warm Spring Indian Reservation, Gateway and Agency Plains -- and groups those areas with Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Wheeler, Morrow and part of Umatilla counties.

The south half of Jefferson County, including Madras, Metolius and Culver, ties to Crook County and the northeast corner of Deschutes County to form the new District 59.

The new District 52 reaches a tentacle from Hood River County over to The Dalles, which just happens to be where Rep. Daniel Bonham (R) lives.

"It felt a little personal," says Bonham, who represents the current District 59, which includes the whole of Jefferson County, Wheeler County, the north part of Deschutes County and the west half of Wasco County.

If Bonham wants to continue as a representative after this term, he has two choices: run in District 52 where he currently lives or move to join his wife who lives in Metolius and run against his colleague Vikki Breese Iverson (R) Prineville, who lives in the newly drawn District 59.

"The question is who's in whose district?" says Bonham. "Quite frankly, I don't have an interest in running against a friend of mine."

Currently, Bonham's district is heavily Republican. In the last election, 60% voted Republican, 37% voted Democrat.

Running for office in District 52 doesn't look promising for a Republican like Bonham. That district includes Hood River County and parts of Multnomah and Clackamas County plus The Dalles and leans Democrat by an 8% margin.

[203 state employees on leave for failure to get COVID-19 vaccine shots](#)

The Oregonian

Half of one percent of Oregon state government employees are on paid administrative leave for failing to get vaccinated against COVID-19 or obtain a religious or medical exemption to the requirement, state officials said Tuesday.

The 203 Oregon employees who are now staying home from work span 24 state agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, state police and the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission, according to data provided by the state.

Oregon for about a week has struggled to tally the direct impact of the vaccine mandate. The agency-by-agency numbers released Tuesday show that impact has been uneven.

Just one agency, the Department of Corrections, accounts for more than 40% of the off-work employees. With roughly 4,500 people on the agency's payroll, the nearly 90 workers on leave account for 2% of the workforce.

The department's 13 prisons continue to operate "normally," a spokesperson for the agency said in an email, with some staff temporarily repurposed to make up for the shortfall.

Of the 88 employees the agency said are on paid leave, 28 have shown they are fully vaccinated, spokesperson Jennifer Black said.

"We are working quickly to get them back to work," Black said.

['We continue to trend down': When should Oregon governor lift statewide mask mandate?](#)

KCBY

Gov. Kate Brown reinstated the statewide mask mandate nearly 2 months ago amid a surge of Delta variant infections.

OF DELTA VARIANT INFECTIONS.

But how long will we need to keep using face coverings?

When exactly Oregon un.masks is up to the governor.

We reached out to her asking about a timeline for lifting the mask requirement. Charles Boyles in Brown's office responded with this statement:

"The governor's goal during the Delta surge continues to be to save lives, protect hospital capacity and keep Oregon businesses, schools and communities open. Every time Oregonians mask up, they help us work toward that goal. Masks are a simple and effective tool to slow the spread of COVID-19. While COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have continued to drop in recent weeks, far too many Oregonians are continuing to be hospitalized and die from COVID-19. The Oregon Health Authority and Oregon OSHA will continue to monitor Oregon's COVID-19 metrics in assessing Oregon's mask requirements in the coming weeks and months."

But local officials say Lane County is heading in the right direction.

"We continue to trend down on a pretty decent pace," says COVID-19 incident commander Steve Adams.

Two months ago, at the peak of the Delta surge, Lane County was averaging over 400 cases per 100,000 people; now we're averaging 150.

"100 cases per hundred thousand is really the mark where we get from this high risk threshold to a more substantial spread," says Adams.

So when will we hit that threshold?

"Certainly the models suggest that by mid to late November, we might be getting below 100 cases per 100 thousand," Adams said.

While Adams can't predict the future, the outlook in Lane County lines up with recent modelling from OHSU, predicting herd immunity in Oregon by the end of the year.

[Oregon's redistricting maps get 'F' grade for partisan fairness](#)

KGW

The Princeton Gerrymandering Project gave the state's redistricting efforts a failing grade for being too politically driven.

[Oregon unemployment rate falls but hiring struggles remain](#)

KGW

Oregon's unemployment rate dropped to 4.7% in September, a rate approaching pre-pandemic levels, but employers are still having difficulty finding workers to hire.

A wide range of industries are still struggling to fill open positions, particularly in government — with schools among the most affected — and the service industry.

The state recorded a net job loss of 200 jobs in September after adding 8,900 jobs in August, per the Oregon Employment Department (OED). That loss was largely attributed to government job losses, concentrated in local school districts adding fewer employees than they typically would at the start of the school year, according to the OED. Districts across the state have started offering incentives and increased wages for positions with the most openings, such as substitute teachers and bus drivers. According to the state employment department, 102,000 Oregonians were unemployed in September.

Restaurants in particular are also facing a major staffing crisis. The Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association said it needs 23,000 workers to fill openings at the businesses it represents.

[Anarchy Reigns in Portland](#)

The Heritage Foundation

Immediately upon taking office, President Joe Biden removed President Donald Trump's designation of Portland, Oregon, as a jurisdiction in anarchy.

So, how are things going now?

Anarchy reigns in the City of Roses.

Over the weekend, police were called to 19 shootings. One of which is likely to be ruled a double homicide, bringing the total number of murders in Portland this year to 71, surpassing the 1987 record of 70.

Homicides are only part of a larger problem in Portland.

Earlier in October, a mob of around 100 anarchists tore up the downtown part of the city while police looked on.

They went on a rampage, spraying slogans like "kill cops" on the buildings they vandalized, and did at least \$500,000 worth of damage, according to Fox Business.

The Portland Police Bureau said that no arrests were made because of the destruction.

The legislation deeply restricts the use of nonlethal crowd control tools, like pepper spray and rubber bullets. Though there are exceptions to this law in the case of serious threats to public safety, like a riot, local authorities are still wary about using these tools.

"The law clearly allows Portland Police to use effective tools necessary to control violent crowds," Oregon House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, a Republican, said in an interview with The Associated Press. "However, activist attorneys are deliberately misinterpreting legislation to prevent police from intervening. They have no business putting law enforcement and community safety at risk."

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, a Democrat, said nothing of the issue.

Wheeler marched with protesters in 2020 following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. He was all aboard the "defund the police" movement, too.

The Portland mayor is a lot quieter these days.

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