



## DSP MEMBERS

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Washington Trust Bank  
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Idaho Central Credit Union  
NAI Black  
Spokane Transit Authority  
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Knife River  
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Canopy Credit Union  
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Goodale & Barbieri Company  
Global Credit Union  
Kiemle Hagood Company  
Coffman Engineers  
DA Davidson  
Wheatland Bank  
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Spokane Hoops Association  
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Numerica Credit Union  
Kutack Rock LLP  
Bank of America  
Paine Hamblen LLP  
NAC Architecture  
Lukins & Annis Law Offices  
Integrus Architecture

April 17, 2023

The Honorable Andy Billig  
Senate Majority Leader  
State Senate  
PO Box 40403  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Laurie Jinkins  
Speaker of the House  
State House of Representatives  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable John Braun  
Senate Republican Leader  
State Senate  
PO Box 40420  
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable J.T. Wilcox  
House Minority Leader  
State House of Representatives  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504

**RE: Restore Commitment to Public Safety in SB 5536**

Honorable Leadership of the State Legislature:

On behalf of the Downtown Spokane Partnership (DSP) Board of Directors, representing employers, small businesses, nonprofits, and residents in the urban core of Washington's second largest city, I am writing to urgently request that you address the increasing impact of illegal drugs on our community by adopting a reasonable and balanced SB 5536 that addresses both the necessity to treat individuals with substance use disorder *and* provide effective tools to initiate and complete treatment.

We urge you to restore and support key policies in the Senate version of SB 5536 that establishes a gross misdemeanor penalty for drug possession with required sentencing for drug-possession convictions if the court finds willful abandonment of treatment or consistent failure to comply with treatment. Coupled with offramps into diversion and treatment programs throughout the legal process and the possibility of vacating convictions for people who complete treatment successfully, SB 5536 can provide the tools to finally motivate individuals into treatment, restore our public spaces, and address the devastating impacts to our community.

Illegal drugs threaten the safety and welfare of everyone. According to the Spokane County Medical Examiner, deaths caused by drug overdoses in 2021 increased by over 285 percent from 2020. Meanwhile, open drug use in our public spaces exposes families, visitors, workers, and others who also use these places to not just undesirable conditions, it also exposes them to negative health hazards and all too often predatory crimes to finance drug purchases. In 2023, year-to-date in just downtown Spokane, property crimes are up by 267 percent while violent crime is up 43 percent.

Our local governments need the tools to address these startling statistics and keep the people that live, work and visit our neighborhoods safe. Statewide policy, including SB 5536, should not preempt the ability for communities to regulate drug possession or use in public spaces.

Fernwell Executive Suites  
Jacobs Engineering  
Maxwell McDonald  
HMA, CPA  
Spokane Sports  
Tempur-Pedic  
Landmark Restaurants  
FPA Crescent Assoc. LLC  
Resource Synergy  
Windermere City Group  
Visit Spokane  
Vista Title & Escrow  
VIP Productions NW  
Spokane Preservation  
Advocates  
SNAP  
Lilac Bloomsday Association  
DeVries Business Services  
Stone Group of Companies  
Greater Spokane Incorporated  
Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture  
Gesa Credit Union  
Seven2 and 14Four  
Spokane Regional  
Transportation Commission  
Ridpath Club Apartments  
WS Property Management  
First Interstate Bank  
4Degrees Real Estate  
ALSC Architects

Too often, we hear reports of employees who are harassed as they make their way from parking to work, retailers sharing stories of shoplifters brazenly walk off with merchandise, and individuals who are threatened with violence. Drug possession and use in public has fostered a negative environment where people don't want to come back to work, businesses can't attract the workforce or customers needed to keep the doors open, consumers are choosing to shop elsewhere and residents fear for their safety. Cities must be able to address these concerns.

For similar reasons, we urge you to remove the designation of treatment facilities as "essential public facilities" in SB 5536. More evaluation is needed to ensure local jurisdictions have input from neighborhoods prior to locating new opioid treatment programs, recovery residences, substance use disorder treatment facilities, and harm-reduction programs before opening. We've seen first-hand how inexperienced operators and nuisances can further threaten urban neighborhoods like downtown Spokane where the over-concentration of facilities and other services has created untenable conditions in some areas. While the best option is removing the designation of treatment facilities as "essential public facilities," at a minimum, we implore you to reject removal of the requirement to conduct at least one public hearing on the establishment of an opioid treatment program facility in the neighborhood or affected community.

Treatment should be a priority in Washington's wholistic approach to substance use disorders and illegal drug use, but it must be balanced with policies that address the spectrum of addiction and its impacts. We thank you for your leadership and work to develop many of the policies in SB 5536 that focus on this, but they must also address individuals who refuse to participate in treatment programs. This must be a part of Washington's strategy to address this crisis.

We appreciate your work to pass legislation that clarifies laws addressing the use and possession of illegal drugs and are committed to continuing to work with you to finally end the epidemic costing so many Washingtonians their lives.

Sincerely,



Emilie Cameron  
President & CEO, Downtown Spokane Partnership

**CC:** Senator Manka Dhingra  
Senator Mike Padden  
Representative Timm Ormsby  
Representative Marcus Riccelli  
Representative Joe Fitzgibbon  
Representative Roger Goodman  
Representative Gina Mosbrucker