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Numerica Credit Union
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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.

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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