

**Testimony of Professor Keith Humphreys, Stanford University to April 9, 2024 hearing of The
California Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials**

Chair Garcia, Vice-Chair Hoover, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak briefly with you and your distinguished colleagues today. I am a professor and addiction researcher at Stanford University and I am here to support A.B. 3073, which would establish a pilot wastewater drug analysis program in California.

It is very hard to push back on epidemics without good information on the severity and nature of the problem, and we unfortunately lack such information on drugs like fentanyl, methamphetamine, and xylazine. People who use drugs often don't respond to government surveys about drug use and drug traffickers obviously do not file corporate reports on drug distribution, so we are left with finding out what drugs are being used and where in the worst possible way, which is from autopsy data from people who died of an overdose.

Most other developed countries¹ surmount this problem by analyzing water samples from sewerage systems. Human beings excrete drugs and metabolites of the drugs they use, which can be detected and measured in wastewater in a fashion similar to that used by public health officials to detect the prevalence of COVID-19 in different parts of our state.

If we had drug wastewater testing in California, we could do two very important things that we can't do now. First, when a new drug entered a town or city or county, public health officials could detect its presence almost immediately and respond accordingly, for example with increased drug checking, public education efforts, or improved overdose response protocols, as appropriate. Second, we would be better able to determine what impact the large

investments we make in prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and law enforcement have on population drug consumption so that we could target future dollars to whichever programs are doing the most good.

I therefore hope you will support this innovative effort to improve our state's capacity to respond effectively to drug problems. I am happy to answer any questions you have if that would be helpful in your deliberations. Thank you for your time and for your leadership on this issue.

Note: Dr. Humphreys' testimony reflects his own views and does not necessarily reflect official positions of his employers.

References

1 The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction has a detailed overview of wastewater technology and findings at https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/topics/wastewater_en