



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 99-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

February 26, 2019

To: Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee
Senator Lee Beyer, Co-Chair
Representative Rob Nosse, Co-Chair

Re: **HB 5026** – Department of Human Services Budget – **Support and Comments**

The League of Women Voters has a national position on Meeting Basic Human Needs that promotes self-sufficiency for individuals and families and invests in social programs designed to prevent or reduce poverty. The League of Women Voters of Oregon supports the work of the Department of Human Services to provide assistance to low income children and families, intellectually developmentally delayed, and aged and physically disabled adults.

Child Welfare and Self-Sufficiency programs have been critical for young families and are a priority for continued funding to maintain safety and stable living environments. The League is concerned about the low level of the cash payments and the inability to afford rental housing in the current market. If a family disintegrates, the older children often break away and become homeless. They are vulnerable on their own and existing youth shelters are not available in all regions.

This bill proposes to transfer the Runaway and Homeless Youth program from Child Welfare to Self-Sufficiency. The placement of children in DHS custody requires court action, but Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) services are not dependent upon agency custody of these children. The transfer of RHY services out of child welfare is understandable. However, services for these youth exist in three state agencies so further coordination or consolidation of state services must be considered.

The League published a study on Runaway and Homeless Youth in February 2007. The Oregon Commission on Children and Families was originally the home for these youth outreach and shelter programs, but HB 3260 (2011) transferred this program to DHS. At that time funding was slightly below \$1 million and covered 8 shelter programs. The Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Programs and youth outreach programs were transferred to the Department of Education Youth Development Division. This Division draws some federal funds for workforce training for youth who have had attendance problems or dropped out of school and funds some mentorship and outreach programs at shelters. The funds are limited and do not cover all eligible programs.

The Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) agency is the recipient of federal and state funds for emergency housing for adults, families and unaccompanied youth. The agency does a one-night count in January to determine the numbers of adults, families and unaccompanied youth in their regions and the state. OHCS receives State Homeless Assistance Program (SHAP) funds which can go to shelter programs for youth. However, shelters do not exist in all regions.


The numbers of unaccompanied youth are increasing as school districts report the number of students who say that they are homeless with or without the family. The existence of youth shelter programs are necessary to stabilize these youth as they attempt to become independent.

The transfer of the RHY program within the DHS agency presents an opportunity to consider the best use of funds for homeless youth, increase the capacity in existing shelters, or establish additional shelters in regions with no resources to shelter youth.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



Norman Turrill
LWVOR President



Karen Nibler
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Cc: Tina Kotek, Speaker of the House