

**Testimony Regarding House Bill 2916A
Before the Senate Housing Committee**

May 13th, 2019

Chair Fagan, Vice-Chair Heard, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this testimony in support of House Bill 2916A, which will provide local jurisdictions with more flexible tools to provide temporary transitional housing options for people experiencing homelessness. I thank you for the opportunity to submit comments.

OLC is a statewide non-profit law firm whose mission is to provide access to justice for the low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Helping families maintain safe, stable housing is a critical part of our work. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy. As vacancy rates have plummeted and housing has become less and less affordable across the state, our clients have increasingly struggled to maintain stability for themselves and their children. We know that this is not just an urban problem - rural Oregonians are particularly impacted.¹ More than 21,000 students experienced homelessness last year, with some of the highest rates coming from rural districts.

We appreciate that this legislature is poised to consider a variety of ways to help ensure access to stable, safe, affordable, and secure housing for all of our communities. This session, we hope to encourage the construction and preservation of more affordable housing stock, greater access to supportive housing, and greater support for specialized and general emergency shelter and housing assistance. Transitional housing accommodations are one way that local jurisdictions can immediately respond to the crisis of homelessness in our communities. These accommodations provide a safe place to sleep and to store belongings, and provide a supportive community for people struggling to access services and transition into permanent housing. These accommodations can and do save lives.

HB 2916A does not create any requirements or mandates, but simply increases flexibility for local jurisdictions wishing to create local solutions designed to best respond to the current housing crisis. The bill removes an arbitrary cap on the number of transitional housing accommodations a local jurisdiction may establish, and clarifies that accommodations may be in the form of more than just yurts – for example, sleeping pods, or conestoga huts are also permissible. Kenton Women’s Village and the Veteran’s Village in Clackamas County are two examples of successful projects that have provided immense benefit to houseless individuals and to the community-at-large. (see <https://www.catholiccharitiesoregon.org/provide-shelter/kenton-womens-village/> and <https://www.clackamas.us/transitionalhousing>)

An investigation of organized transitional housing camp communities in Seattle and Portland found that their presence generally reduced crime, and increased safety and sanitation options for houseless individuals.² While in no case would we suggest that transitional housing accommodations are a permanent solution for the housing crisis, these accommodations certainly offer immediate benefit for houseless individuals. Without a safe place

¹ <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2018/03/07/update-on-rural-housing-affordability/>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/23/homeless-villages-crime-rate-seattle-portland>

to sleep or store belongings, it can be difficult or impossible to address health concerns, access services, or find support. For all of the above reasons, we support HB 2916A.

Thank you very much for your consideration and for the opportunity to submit testimony.