

To: Chair Fahey and Members of the Committee on Housing

From: Xan Augerot, Chair, Benton County Board of Commissioners

Re: HB 2100

As a Benton County Commissioner, I have served on the Board of Community Services Consortium (CSC) for the past four years. CSC is our Community Action Agency, providing social services to our most vulnerable community members in Benton, Linn and Lincoln counties. Once COVID struck, CSC staff immediately went into high gear, to ensure service delivery to our most vulnerable populations. They have been critical in keeping people warm, fed, and in their homes, pumping more than \$6 million dollars in emergency funds into needy households across our three counties, working in tandem with a network of community-based organizations.

Benton County places a high premium on equity, and it infuses all of our work with and for our communities. Embedding racial and ethnic equity into statute is a positive step. However, HB 2100 does far more than that. It replaces a stakeholder-driven, negotiated funding allocation formula that generates need-based geographic equity with a system that will result in inequitable resource distribution across the state and that will slowly disinvest in our current capacity to address homelessness.

- Redirecting 20% of the allocation from community action agencies (CAAs) to a competitive RFP process will immediately reduce funds for homelessness in our community by approximately \$175k/year – the cost of a cold-weather shelter season;
- Capping allocation to community action agencies at 80% of *current service level* funding will result in an erosion of funds for our local homeless shelters, domestic violence assistance, culturally responsive support for the Latinx community, veteran’s homelessness services etc., over time;
- The eroding funding base will make long-term investments in local organizational capacity and infrastructure challenging – at a time when the coordinating role played by CSC has become more critical than ever. This past year, several local organizations serving our homeless community came together to ask CSC to take the lead in applying for grant support, as they are the only entity that has the capacity to
 - Operate on a reimbursement basis;
 - Fully support data and reporting requirements;
 - Ensure coordination across our emerging homeless services continuum.

I urge you to step back and take a more measured approach, engaging CAAs and CBOs at the same table to determine a path forward. One strategy might be to require Community Action Agencies to re-grant a certain portion of their allocated funds to culturally responsive or appropriate community-based organizations. CAAs know best the demographics of their community and the capacity of CBOS. Most CAAs are nimble at sub-granting and ensuring accountability – both to state and federal funders and to local constituents. OHCS in contrast is over-burdened, and competitive granting processes are often slow and unresponsive.

On behalf of our Benton County constituents, I ask that you oppose HB 2100 as it is currently written.