

My name is Barb Higinbotham and I am the Executive Director for Community in Action, the designated Community Action Agency that represents Harney and Malheur Counties. The Community Action Agency Network represents 100% of the state of Oregon and offers services to low-income residents that include homeless services. I am writing to express my concerns over HB2100, which will have multiple negative consequences if passed.

This proposal will lead to a 20% reduction in existing local services and will divert ANY future funding for EHA/SHAP services away from local networks. We currently serve a high number of customers who have disabilities, customers who have been underrepresented, the elderly, and the homeless. This proposal will put all of these populations at risk of losing local services.

A decline in financial commitment in rural areas will ensure more challenges to long-term investments. This will negatively affect our ability to expand infrastructure, which is critical to addressing the homeless crisis. This will negatively affect our ability to leverage federal funds that require matching state or flexible funding. We are seeing the loss right now as some projects cannot move forward with the uncertainty of future funding.

This bill puts local partnerships at risk throughout our local communities. As one of the smallest agencies in the state, Community in Action partners with dozens of local entities that include faith based, non-profit, veteran organizations, school districts, domestic violence shelters, day shelters, and meal sites in two counties. Innovative partnerships have always taken place as limited funding is challenging in rural communities. If OHCS creates a competitive process for accessing funding, rural Oregon will lose. Salem should not be making decisions for rural Oregon and local leaders do not want that.

Oregon Housing & Community Services failed to consult with the network that provides services to the homeless. The network was informed on December 28, 2020 of their intent to disinvest in homeless services currently being provided by the network. This behind the scenes design and decision making is difficult to understand. Oregon Housing & Community Services continues to drive toward a pre-determined outcome unwilling to make meaningful changes. We deserve better and the homeless customers we serve deserve better.

This is a challenging time for all Oregonians. Homeless services customers and those who are trying desperately to hold onto the housing they currently have are in danger. The eviction moratorium is set to expire and these customers are going to be placed in a worse situation than they are in today. Oregon Housing & Community Services should be working with the CAA Network that has successfully invested millions of dollars into homeless services to help local customers meet their housing and other immediate needs.

In August of 2020, the CAA Network reached a one-time compromise with Oregon Housing & Community Services regarding the distribution of Emergency Solutions Grant funds (\$50M). This fund was split by investing in the CAA Network in the amount of \$7M and leaving approximately \$43M for Oregon Housing & Community Services to invest outside the CAA Network. The goal was to increase capacity to get emergency rental assistance out during the pandemic. The CAA Network invested \$7million into the homeless services systems quickly and responsibly. To date, Oregon Housing & Community Services has invested \$0 of these dollars and they are still tied up in their bureaucratic processes while Oregonians are suffering.

I urge you to not advance this bill as the consequences may be more devastating than we can imagine. The ripple effects in rural communities will be dire and low-income customers will suffer more.