

Co-Chair Johnson, Co-Chair Steiner-Hayward, Co-Chair Rayfield, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. As the Program Supervisor of Maslow Project, I am dedicated to providing basic needs, advocacy and case management to homeless youth in Jackson and Josephine Counties. I am writing to you today to advocate for full funding for HB 2544, to provide and ensure a full continuum of services for Oregon's unaccompanied houseless youth, youth who are not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians, and who are homeless.

I hope you will join me in affirming housing as a basic human right for all Oregonians, especially our youth. Oregon ranks among the first in the nation for our houseless youth population. With that in mind, we invest less than 1/12th the amount our neighbors in Washington State do.

HB2544 provides \$2.2M to support host home providers across Oregon, a model with a strong national reputation, for which Oregon is considered a leader in programming. Host Homes provide youth with long-term housing supports as well as a stable home, family, and support system while they attend school. HB2544 also provides \$2.2 to expand or enhance existing UHY shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, mental health/substance use services, and other transitional housing options.

Approximately 1 in 10 youth in Medford & surrounding area schools are homeless, and of those identified, several hundred are unaccompanied. Many youth cite that they are unable to attend school or attain stability because of fear of their safety due to their living situation. Just this year we have met youth who have been victims of sex trafficking, molestation & domestic violence, in addition to those who have lost their homes in the Alameda fire. Some youth have lost connection to their families because of unhealthy family dynamics like parent mental health or substance abuse, or simply because they have had to split up to spread out resources.

In the United States, half of homeless adults first experienced houselessness in their youth. We know that by investing in services for this population that we can and will deter lifetimes of housing instability and homelessness. Every child and young adult deserves to have access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive. HB 2544 ensures that is a reality for our young Oregonians experiencing houselessness.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Fallon Stewart