

Hello,  
Ways & Means,  
Thanks for this opportunity,

My name is Shannon Olive, and I am the Founder/Director for a new women organization of 4 years, WomenFirst Transition & Referral Center located in Gresham Oregon. We worked to serve women transitioning from prison, in recovering from addiction, and women recovering from trauma to help them overcome their obstacles so they too can become successful and productive citizens of our community.

Our primary objective is to continue to provide a safe environment space, offer women the tools they need to improve their physical and mental wellbeing and avoid relapse or return to prison. We understand the challenges and barriers women face within the justice system such as having access to housing, education, employment, expungements, DHS/navigating the state custody system, to regain parenting rights, and OHP/Medicare. Our goal is to use peer mentorship and recovery services informed by lived experienced of WF leadership, to reduce recidivism and provide a strong and lasting support system for our participants to not only survive but thrive once released. We are aware that needs change over time and often do so suddenly. The COVID pandemic is an excellent example of how life can suddenly present us with new and daunting challenges.

We have secured housing for 5 of our women exiting prison since 2018 2 are waiting to be housed. Last year through an OHA CARES FUND grant we were able to serve 200 BIPOC families the day after Christmas with rent assistance, utility assistance, ppe equipment giveaway, and provide food security in the Metro and Gresham Area to help with housing stability during this unexpected crisis. Now, our women participants are asking is there funding to help assist with back pay. They have family who also need assistance because they or their family can not afford paying the back pay, current rent, other household expenses, childcare, transportation cost, while seeking a full-time livable wage job survive.

Its hard with COVID constantly on the rise and every time you look on the news the numbers are steady rising. The businesses, services and programs are opening and closing. And for the Recovery Community its hard for us because our services needs to stay open. We have had women relapse, they have had mental health breakdowns, isolate themselves from us because of they have had family members continuous to pass away due to gun violence, but thinking of the threats of being homeless. We at WomenFirst we are doing our best to create ways to continue to prevent relapse, reduce the recidivism rate, and apply for funding that would stabilize our women and children, we know this America Rescue Plan will create a solution and allow us community leaders to work with you Legislators to assist with preventing homelessness by providing back-rent funding that prioritizes unemployed and very low-income tenants, targeting people of color, immigrants and especially undocumented immigrants, people with disabilities, seniors, and other vulnerable renter populations.

And distribute the funds to smaller organizations like WomenFirst and other BIPOC organizations to allow us to meet the needs for the communities in which we serve, so we can prevent any other crisis and help to make Oregon to become better place for ALL.  
Will you support SB 5555?

Thanks,  
Shannon Olive-WomenFirst