

Hood River Shelter Services Supports HB 2006

My name is Sarah Kellems and I am the Director of Hood River Shelter Services. I am writing to express support for House Bill 2006. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story.

For the past ten years, Hood River Shelter Services has operated a winter Warming Shelter in Hood River County; and our program provides the only emergency shelter option in the County. Last winter, Hood River Shelter Services provided shelter and supportive services to 94 individuals, including 13 women and 14 people over the age of 60. On average, we served 19 people per night.

Over our ten-year history, we have shifted from an entirely volunteer-based model to adding paid seasonal staff to increase safety, consistency, and stability. Mine is the only year-round position, and it is half-time.

Hood River Shelter Services has never had a stable, long-term location. In the early years, our program moved every week, which was stressful and exhausting for both shelter guests and community volunteers. For the past three winters, shelter services were housed in a room rented in a local church; this space had six bunk beds with overflow space for sleeping in the church hallways. Once COVID hit it was clear this location could not continue to be viable.

Last summer, while exploring options for a new location, we learned about “non-congregate” shelter, which limits shared breathing space to reduce exposure to and transmission of the virus. We moved forward with a non-congregate model, and were granted CARES funds from The City of Hood River and Hood River County to purchase emergency shelter units made by the company Pallet Shelter.

We then explored over a dozen public and privately-owned sites, the majority of which either turned us down, or the site itself proved unfeasible. We finally secured this winter’s location at the eleventh hour only because of last year’s emergency flexible shelter siting.

This year’s shelter operates seven days a week through mid-March in the parking lot of Hood River Valley Christian Church. Our application was submitted literally on the last day of the emergency siting window. Without it, the shelter would not have opened this winter.

We are extremely excited about House Bill 2006 and I am writing to express support for this legislation on behalf of Hood River Shelter Services. If this bill passes, it would have a significant, positive, and stabilizing impact on our organization and on ongoing homeless services here in Hood River County and throughout our state.

Our current location is a one-year agreement only. Without flexible siting, a location for next winter may not be possible. If House Bill 2006 passes, it will allow us not only to secure a site for next winter, but hopefully to also secure a long-term location that would act as a hub for other necessary services such as showering and laundry and perhaps case management and other long-term supports.



Photo Description: Hood River Shelter Services Non-Congregate Shelter Site, Hood River Valley Christian Church, January 2021

Photo Credit: HRSS Staff

February 12, 2021