



DEVELOPING THRIVING COMMUNITIES

February 23, 2021

House Committee on Housing
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: In support of HB 2163 – long term rent assistance for youth aging out of foster care and homeless youth

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Campos and Morgan, and Members of the Committee:

DevNW is an affordable housing development and asset building agency serving Lane, Linn, Benton, Lincoln, Marion and Clackamas counties. For the last 6 years we have operated a 12-unit apartment complex in Eugene dedicated to former foster youth, and for the last year we have operated a young adult rental assistance program in Clackamas County. Based on this experience, we have learned a great deal about the barriers facing these young people, and the resilience they show if given the right supports. We fully support HB 2163 and the creation of this long term rent assistance program.

Youth aging out of foster care (and other institutional settings) are at incredibly high risk for homelessness and housing insecurity. They are expected to miraculously find housing – in Oregon’s current rental market – without a co-signer, rental history, credit history, or sufficient income. This often leaves them outright homeless or at the mercy of unstable or abusive people who can provide them a couch to sleep on. In turn, lack of housing security makes it harder for them to find and maintain employment, finish school, and make a successful transition to adulthood. Unfortunately, we all know the resulting statistics around low graduation rates, involvement with the justice system, early and unplanned pregnancy, and many more.

But we know that we can reverse these statistics, and it starts with safe and stable housing. HB 2163 offers two key opportunities to change the story for our most vulnerable youth:

1. It will provide long term rent assistance to help them secure and afford their own stable housing.
2. It will connect them with affordable housing providers, who often provide other social services to the adult population – a crucial relationship as these young people transition to independence. As a state, we have a chasm between traditional youth-serving systems (foster care, K-12 schools, pediatric medicine and mental health, youth sports, etc.) and adult-serving systems (affordable housing, health care, workforce training, etc.), and we don’t do enough to ensure that youth aging out of care have the connections to access the help they need as adults.

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DevNW knows, from firsthand experience, how youth can thrive in stable housing. The young adults we work with maintain jobs, attend college (often both), volunteer for youth advocacy efforts, and are all-around amazing young people. But they can't do it alone; as a state, we need to step up and provide the extra assistance they need to make that transition to independence and adulthood, and that can start with HB2163.

Thank you for your support of this bill, and everything you're doing to address the housing crisis in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Emily Reiman
CEO