

Dear Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs Leif and Ruiz, and members of the House Human Services Committee,

The members of the Western Washington County COVID-19 Task Force for the Unhoused would like to ask you to pass house Bill 2544 and recognize the need for the Department of Human Services to award two-year grants to organizations that provide services to unaccompanied homeless youth and to organizations that operate Host Home projects for unaccompanied homeless youth. Host Homes are a model where community members volunteer to house a young person. We know that unaccompanied homeless youth have been under-represented in funding streams, as they are under-represented in data regarding the experience of homelessness overall. We know that the poverty levels have increased--as seen in reliance on local food banks and calls to our closest Community Action for emergency assistance, anecdotally our local churches known for their services have also experienced an increase in calls. Speaking with McKinney-Vento Liaisons, we know that the enrolled # of youth experiencing homelessness is lower than average, which highlights a lack of contact, not an increase in stability. We are worried about the lack of resources for our unaccompanied homeless youth, leading many of them to stay in dangerous situations longer, or potentially fleeing the area seeking help elsewhere. Funding must reach the far corners of our Metro and Rural counties, with specific focus on allowing local groups to bolster services allowing us to keep people living where they want to stay. Particularly our young adults, who historically have gone underserved outside of the Metro Region.

We also want to specify that while our public transit route and county lines connect us to the Portland Metro Region. The economics, politics, and geography change drastically coming out of Hillsboro into Cornelius and further west. By April 2020 city officials from the Cities of Forest Grove and Cornelius were meeting alongside local service providers for the purposes of ensuring continued services to our houseless population during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. What ended up being highlighted was how much we could accomplish collectively in regards to filling service gaps and advocating for funding to be available to local agencies. As the Local Implementation Board associated with the Metro Housing Bond funding stated in their Committee Recommendations on January 13th 2021; "Washington County must recognize the needs for homeless adults are not the same for homeless youth." Here in Western Washington County we know that, but we need our local agencies to have funding to be able to provide needed services, and expand in areas that are currently lacking. Increasing access to Outreach, Culturally Specific Services; and Mental Health or Substance Abuse Services alongside strengthening partnerships with Host Home programs and other Transitional Housing options is exactly what our local young people need. The discussion has been happening for years regarding exactly these services, but with the funding that could be provided with House Bill 2544 they become feasible for smaller agencies and the less-populated areas of our state.

Please pass House Bill 2544 and give homeless youth service providers a chance.

Sincerely,

Celeste Goulding MSW

Western Washington County Coordinator for Second Home a program of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Lincoln County Coordinator for Second Home

Forest Grove Foundation Board Member

Forest Grove SURJ Member

– Author, presented to TaskForce for approval 2/18/2021. Attending members approved, organizations listed below.

City of Forest Grove

City of Cornelius

Forest Grove McKinney-Vento Liaison

Centro Cultural de Washington County

Adelante Mujeres

Pacific University School of Social Work

HomePlate Youth Services

Bienestar