



February 24, 2021

Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs Leif and Ruiz and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Oregon, we express our support for House Bill 2544.

It is well recognized that homeless young people represent a population that is hidden in plain sight. They sleep in cars, abandoned buildings and any place they can find. Instead of consistency and support, they must often fend for themselves in situations that we would find impossible to navigate. Hunger, too, regularly accompanies homelessness.

Homelessness has a significant and negative impact on children's success in school. Simply being able to attend school is difficult, and these children regularly find themselves moving from school to school, or not being able to attend at all. Chronic absenteeism is prevalent.

In today's schools, access to computers and internet is essential. Without a home, this access is either nonexistent or severely limited. Learning is in and of itself a difficult process for all young people, but the lack of stability further stacks the deck against the success of children who are without a home base. One wonders, where can these children store books or read them without a space, perhaps even a desk or a room, accompanied by proper lighting, food, shelter, support?

Homeless young people carry significant emotional burdens that can impede their social, emotional and economic development. With courage and hard work many of these young people are able to eventually attain a sense of self-respect and dignity, but the barriers erected to achieving these goals are multiple and substantial.

We cannot countenance this situation. If we continue to do so, we will only be assuring that there will be continuing generations of homeless young people.

House Bill 2544 is not the full or final answer to these problems, but it represents a well-informed and well-crafted effort to ameliorate them. It will also provide groundwork for further investments in these children.

Our message to Oregon's homeless children needs to be -- we do care.

Respectfully,

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