



2/24/2020

Re: HB2544

Chair Williams, Vice-Chair's Leif and Ruiz, and members of the Committee,

Jackson Street promotes safety, stability, and well-being to youth ages 10 – 24. We work to prevent homelessness by showing a path to long-term success through building positive relationships and skills for self-sufficiency. Youth homelessness is a broad and hidden challenge. Recent research by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, Voices of Youth Count report, found that at least 1 in 30 adolescents (ages 13-17) experience some form of homelessness unaccompanied by a parent or guardian over the course of a year. And 1 in 10 young adults (ages 18-25) experience the same. **Youth homelessness is the major pathway adult homelessness.** Although every story is different, there are common paths to homelessness. The majority of homeless youth have either run away, been kicked out of unstable home environments, abandoned by their families or caregivers, involved with public systems (foster care, juvenile justice, and mental health) or have a history of residential instability and disconnection.

Hispanic, non-white youth had a 33% higher risk of reporting homelessness; LGBT youth had a 120% higher risk of reporting homelessness; Black or African American youth had a 83% higher risk of reporting homelessness. Disproportionality of homelessness experiences among black youth mirrors racial disparities documented elsewhere for example in school suspensions, incarceration, and foster care placement. Well, you probably didn't need to know all those statistics to understand that racism and discrimination increase the risk of youth homelessness. But you might be surprised to learn that youth homelessness is as common in rural counties as it is in non-rural counties. When compared to urban areas, youth experiences of homelessness in rural counties are perhaps more hidden, with greater reliance on couch surfing and sleeping in vehicles or outdoors. Youth experiencing homelessness in rural counties were more disconnected from education and employment than those in larger, more urban counties. American Indian and Alaska Native youth have more than double the risk of homelessness as other youth. **Current funding is not adequate to cover metropolitan areas, and reach diverse populations and rural counties, as well.** The competition for funding is too difficult and unstable. Youth need a safe place to be AND wrap around services in order to able to focus on their well-being, education, life skills, and employment. We need increased, stable funding for Homeless Youth programs. By joining investments already made by federal grants and community donors, HB2544 can ensure we are able to meet the needs of Oregon youth and reach outcomes that will truly reduce trauma and homelessness and grow our economy with a young, healthy, compassionate work force.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ann P. Craig".

Ann P. Craig, Executive Director

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