



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

February 24, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2163-2

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project in support of HB 2163-2.

Northwest Pilot Project (NWPP) is a nonprofit social service agency that serves people aged 55 and older experiencing housing instability and homelessness in Multnomah County. We work to end homelessness for low income seniors, who are among the fastest growing segment of the population experiencing homelessness.

Since the early 2010s, social service agencies have seen a notable increase in older adults seeking emergency housing assistance. More individuals are experiencing homelessness at a later age, in part because a distinct cohort of individuals who were born in the latter part of the baby boom generation are at a significantly higher risk for homelessness. For this cohort, in which BIPOC are overrepresented due to structural racism, the “back to back recessions”¹ they faced when entering the workforce combined with decades of racially disparate outcomes in unemployment, contact with the criminal justice system, and access to housing resulted in a “downward-shifted economic trajectory.”²

In many ways, the story of older adult homelessness is the story of vulnerable youth who did not get the help they needed at a critical point in time. Our most vulnerable seniors experiencing homelessness are likelier to have had their first experience of homelessness earlier in life and report more adverse life experiences and low income attainment in early adulthood. ³

¹ The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness (2019), Dennis Culhane, PhD et al. <https://www.aisp.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Emerging-Crisis-of-Aged-Homelessness-1.pdf>

² Shelterforce (June 2020). <https://shelterforce.org/2020/06/12/why-we-must-protect-young-people-from-homelessness-now/>

³ Pathways to Homelessness Among Homeless Older Adults (2016), Rebecca T. Brown et. al. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0155065>

Since January of 2018, NWPP has partnered with Home Forward, Meyer Memorial Trust, the Joint Office of Homeless Services in Multnomah County, CareOregon, JOIN, Native American Rehabilitation Association and other community partners to administer 72 permanent, locally funded vouchers to households experiencing and at risk of homelessness, through our Long-term Rent Assistance (LRA) Pilot Program. The program was envisioned to address the lack of affordable units for the extremely low income population we work with, who often rely on Social Security as their only source of income and typically spend 3-6 years before accessing a subsidized unit.

The July 2019 evaluation report⁴ published by the Center for Outcomes Research and Education about the LRA program confirmed what we had hoped: **with permanent rent assistance, our participants thrived, reporting a 100% retention rate in stable housing while also demonstrating substantial improvements in mental and physical health as well as other aspects of wellbeing.** After only a year, many participants reported being able to save money and being able to help loved ones again, with some reporting their outlook had shifted so much they now hoped to volunteer in their communities or go back to school.

The incredible success of our long term rent assistance pilot inspires hope for a day when no senior experiences homelessness. But when we look at the pathways of older adults into homelessness, we can't help but see how for many, this assistance should have arrived much earlier.

We could do so much more for vulnerable seniors if our communities truly invested in prevention and long-term stability at the **first** opportunity. Ensuring our most vulnerable youth have the housing they need to pursue employment, training, and other opportunities during their transition to adulthood is a necessary part of preventing another generation from experiencing older adult homelessness.

HB 2163-2 is an opportunity to demonstrate the impact of earlier intervention as well as the lasting benefits of long-term rent assistance.

On behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, I urge you to support this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marisa Espinoza
Public Policy Coordinator
Northwest Pilot Project

⁴ Long Term Rent Assistance Program Evaluation Final Report (2019), Center for Outcomes Research and Education. https://www.nwpilotproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CORE_LRA-Final-Report.pdf