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Interchurch Center

245 S. Bancroft St., Ste. B

Portland, Oregon 97239

phone (503) 221-1054

fax (503) 223-7007

email emo@emoregon.org

website EMOregon.org

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

Working with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strives to envision communities of faith in ministry together creating a more peaceful, just, sustainable, and compassionate world. At EMO we affirm that housing is a basic human right and echo our community's demand for state investment in providing long-term rent assistance.

EMO strongly supports HB 2163. Providing long-term rent assistance to former foster youth addresses a known vulnerable entry-point into homelessness and creates target investments to help these youth find safe and affordable housing.

Recognizing that Oregon has the highest rate of youth homelessness in the nation, EMO is dedicated to advocating for state investment in these youth. Through both our push for expanding services for unaccompanied houseless youth statewide and through directly serving houseless youth in four counties through our Second Home program, we understand the importance of providing housing for ALL youth who have had to flee a dangerous home. Nationally, 51% of unaccompanied houseless youth are from communities of color. Black youth comprise a full 34% of all unaccompanied houseless youth in the U.S. And 33% of unaccompanied houseless youth were previously in the foster care system.

Long-term investment is key to creating long-term solutions. Half of all adults who are chronically homeless experienced homelessness as youth. The pilot program that HB 2163 proposes will help to address this gap by providing support to youth who need it as they transition to adulthood and living on their own. It's necessary that we continue to break down these barriers that prohibit people from securing the support they need to have safe and affordable housing. Providing these housing services and long-term rent assistance is vital to keeping people housed.

We urge you to support HB 2163 and join us in serving and investing in the safety and well-being of our communities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Ella Burke

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon