



February 11th, 2022

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Capital Construction
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE, Room H-178, Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Senator Girod, Representative Holvey, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in support of the “Heart of Oregon Corps” capital project under consideration in SB5701. Based on a feasibility study conducted in 2021, we are planning to consolidate our five locations into one vibrant, centralized hub campus in Redmond, Oregon.

Youth and young adults in Central Oregon need opportunities to explore, learn, and build skills for their futures. While some youth find these opportunities in our public schools, or on bustling college campuses, and have ample family support, there is a significant percentage of youth and young adults who need other work-focused, community-based options, and support. As a leader in empowering young adults to transform their lives and communities, Heart of Oregon Corps (HOC) meets that need.

Operating for 22 years, Heart of Oregon Corps focuses on engaging 16-24-year-old “Opportunity Youth” who are disconnected from school and work, in addition to minority youth (33% of participants), youth who experience disabilities (20% of participants), youth from rural and smaller communities (72% of participants live outside of Bend, OR), and other youth experiencing barriers such as low incomes, foster care, court-involvement, and housing instability. We engage hundreds of diverse Central Oregon youth each year in meaningful, challenging, and growth-filled workforce development and educational opportunities.

Our six programs currently provide training in four areas—conservation, construction, childcare, and customer service. Participants earn wages or stipends, scholarships, workforce certifications, diplomas/GEDs, and in one program, even Oregon BOLI pre-apprenticeship certification. Young people earned half a million dollars in wages and stipends at Heart of Oregon Corps in 2021 alone. At program completion, young adults utilize transition services to connect with our rich network of Central Oregon businesses eager to hire them on.

Importantly, young people in our programs don’t just *receive* services, they also *deliver* services to their communities. Through their project-based training they improve their communities by building affordable housing, maintaining trails, processing recycling, and reducing fire fuels to prevent wildfire. Over two

decades, 4,500 Heart of Oregon Corps youth have built 34 affordable homes and improved 35,000 acres of public lands. Now that's impact.

Heart of Oregon Corps' current locations are operating over capacity with no additional space for growth, are aging, and present operational inefficiencies. Only the Madras location is securely owned by HOC. This capital funding request of \$2,000,000 will provide the necessary support for HOC to consolidate the five locations into a much-needed centralized hub campus while allowing us to stay connected to partnership-based satellite offices in surrounding rural communities.

During project planning, we conducted a facility vision and needs assessment with our youth, alumni, staff, and board. We envision a connected hub campus to offer enhanced and expanded services, additional classrooms and workshops for existing and new training tracks, collaboration spaces, specialty program spaces, and the utility, logistical, equipment storage and parking infrastructure needed for our unique and robust operations. By applying trauma-informed design principles and listening to youth needs, we identified critical youth program components like community gathering spaces, access to showers and laundry, a commercial kitchen, access to regional public transport routes, and outdoor amenities to gather, learn, recreate, and connect.

The \$5.3M project has proven feasible and the partnership-based site is shovel ready. An MOU is signed for 25-50-year long term lease. The project will renovate an existing manufacturing building and construct a new adjacent facility. In all, approximately 32,000 of square feet of space will be combined with modified covered equipment bays, better ingress/egress roadways, and outdoor amenities throughout the 7-acre campus. By renovating existing space with a low cost per square foot it allows us to focus our resources on constructing a new adjacent building that represents the values of our organization. HOC's unique needs for classroom and industrial training spaces, comprehensive parking and equipment infrastructure, and vibrant community spaces are met at this site.

In addition, this project contributes to the larger community beyond our mission and services. First, it will beautify and revitalize this industrial site, located right along Highway 126 near its intersection with Highway 97. This area is directly adjacent to Redmond's Urban Renewal District. Second, the hub campus will provide opportunities to partner with other like-minded organizations to further meet community needs without duplicating services. For example, REACH child care center and Opportunity Foundation will be just steps away. Third, Heart of Oregon Corps will evaluate the best options for satellite offices and youth crew meet-up locations throughout Central Oregon, from Warm Springs to Crescent, generating fresh partnership-based synergies and solutions for youth.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We understand that resources are limited and we believe that investing in this project is an opportunity to provide necessary support to young adults in Central Oregon through advancing education, building skills, and creating jobs.

Sincerely,



Laura M Handy
Executive Director