



OREGON HOUSING *and*
COMMUNITY SERVICES

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April 21, 2023

House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: OHCS SB 893 Follow Up

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Helfrich and Gamba, and Members of the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness,

Thank you for making space for OHCS to discuss [Senate Bill 893](#) and the critical components of this bill that will support OHCS operations and our vision for homelessness response and prevention work moving forward.

OHCS has a deep commitment to addressing racial disparities in homeless services programming and are grateful that commitment is shared with your Committee. During our conversation, committee members raised questions regarding the timing of implementation of recommendations from the House Bill 2100 Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide additional context and information around this work:

Timing Considerations

When [House Bill 2100](#) was first introduced in 2021, it sought to address the statutory requirement that ongoing homeless services funding be distributed exclusively through the Community Action Agency network and open up the ability to advise OHCS and receive funding to new partners. Such proposed shifts represented large, fundamental changes to systems that have existed for decades. Due to the nature of the conversations around the bill and through thoughtful negotiations, House Bill 2100 passed in June of 2022 creating the [Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities](#), or HB 2100 Task Force as it is commonly referred to.

Composed of culturally specific organizations, Community Action Agencies, local governments, individuals with lived experience of homelessness, representation from Oregon Housing and Community Services, the Oregon Housing Stability Council, and Governor's Racial Justice Council, and a bipartisan and bicameral group of legislators, the Task Force began meeting in of December of 2021 after legislative appointments were made in November of 2021. OHCS contracted support from a national organization with expertise in homeless services systems change work to support Task Force facilitation.

The groups' first charge was to produce a report by February of 2022 with recommendations to the Legislature on methods to shift Oregon's homeless services funding structure and receive additional guidance from other partners to reduce racial disparities. After a marathon process, in the midst of the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and OHCS and service providers receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in emergency funding to be quickly distributed, the Task Force released their first set of recommendations, [which can be read here](#).

The Task Force identified critical reflections on the work ahead, but determined additional time and attention would be needed to build on those recommendations. Thus, in the 2022 Short Session, the Task Force was



continued through 2026 and charged with releasing a final report to the Legislature by March 30, 2023 [via House Bill 4051](#).

The Task Force met in both full group meetings and in smaller subcommittee meetings from the Summer of 2022 to March 2023 to release their final report and recommendations to the Legislature. The final report represents the views of the diverse perspectives on the Task Force. The report, released on March 24, 2023, [can be read here](#). Among other recommendations, the Task Force recommended a new funding structure for ongoing homeless services funding, which would include four unique funding streams each dedicated to a critical component of the state's homeless services system:

- The nine federally recognized tribes that border within Oregon
- Community Action Agencies
- Continuums of Care (CoCs) or similar local planning groups, and
- Culturally specific, culturally responsive, culturally based, and other organizations that are focused on reducing racial disparities in homelessness

SB 893 marks a commitment from Oregon Housing and Community Services to engage in the needed planning and operational work to bring forward major systems changes to be implemented in the 2025-27 biennium. The level of systems change outlined in SB 893 represents a decisive and significant shift in OHCS' way of doing business, and we are committed to doing that work in a thoughtful, community-driven, manner. This work will take time and significant state resources to do right and avoid unintended harmful impacts to the very communities the work is intended to serve.

SB 893 is not a delay in implementing systems change- it represents OHCS leaning into accountability by committing to clear next steps and a timeline for implementation. Through this bill, OHCS would be required to report to the Legislature no later than March 15, 2024, on our plan to implement the new funding pathways outlined above beginning in the 2025-27 biennium, including needed statutory changes.

We also want to be clear that to ensure existing services are not disrupted, new and significant investments will likely be needed from the Legislature to facilitate such a new and expanded homeless services system.

Implementation of Recommendations

In our homeless services work that is not required to be directed to specific partners, namely with the influx of one-time funding the agency has received in the 21-23 biennium, **OHCS has worked to prioritize funding new partnerships, with an emphasis on supporting culturally specific and responsive partners and providers.**

This has included investments of homelessness response and/or prevention funding for the nine federally recognized tribes that border within Oregon, Oregon Worker Relief Coalition, Urban League of Portland, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), and community-based organizations that are a part of OHA's network of partners.

This also includes the many culturally specific and responsive organizations and Tribal governments who have received funding through homelessness response programs since OHCS has begun requiring Community Action Agencies to partner with culturally specific and responsive partners as part of their funding agreements.

In addition, the efforts currently underway to respond to the State of Emergency related to homelessness closely align with the recommendations from the HB 2100 Task Force. This includes:



- Additional dedicated pass-through tribal investments and
- Funds directed to Continuums of Care (CoCs) with a specific requirement to reduce racial disparities in their community plans to receive funds allocated via [HB 5019](#).

This biennium, **as we implement the work of Executive Order 23-02, we expect be able to pilot some of the above recommendations, and learn critical lessons that our agency, and our partners, will be able to then act on** when implementing a new and permanent funding structure as outlined in this bill. Throughout all the work listed above and ahead of us, OHCS will remain deeply committed to embedding racial equity in our funding and programing.

Capacity

As was shared with the Committee, both agency and service provider capacity has been a major concern and constraint over the last few years.

OHCS' Housing Stabilization Division alone has received over \$885.4 million in one-time funds in the 2021-23 biennium, with the agency at large having received over \$2 billion in one-time funds to distribute in addition to the agency's ongoing programs. This scale dwarfs past investments the agency had received and required staff to take on the role of two or three positions as OHCS, like other agencies, struggled to bring staff onboard at the speed needed. Staffing remains a challenge throughout state government.

Mr. Jones shared yesterday that provider capacity continues to be extremely strained as staff on the ground respond to increasing homelessness, evictions, and continued levels of increased need. OHCS continues to hear from partners that staff compensation, turnover, training, and support remain critical issues in addressing their needs.

OHCS is actively working to better support our partners in engaging in housing and homelessness work, but these issues remain dire in many communities.

It is vital to acknowledge that communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impacts— and the truth remains that both agency and provider capacity to operate even more new programming on top of COVID and emergency response work is limited.

That is why **OHCS is committed to taking the much-needed time in the 2023-25 biennium to engage with partners and community members to collectively bring forward a new system that will better meet the needs of those doing the work on the ground and the Oregonians they seek to serve.**

OHCS looks forward to engaging with this committee and the Legislature as we work to address racial disparities in homelessness and housing. We remain committed to leading with our values and investing in outcomes with a vision that we do not have to accept Oregon's current reality as a fact of life.

In partnership,

Jill Smith
Director, Housing Stabilization Division
Oregon Housing & Community Services

