

Chair Dexter, Co-Vice Chair Gamba, Co-Vice Chair Helfrich, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. As the **Program Officer** of **Maslow Project**, we are dedicated to **providing wrap-around support to homeless youth and their families so that they may engage and thrive independently, in all aspects of life, and build resilient futures**. I am **writing to you today** to advocate for full funding for HB 2454 and HB 2456, to provide and ensure a full continuum of services for Oregon's unaccompanied houseless youth, those who are not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians, and who are homeless.

I hope you will join me in affirming housing as a basic human right for all Oregonians, especially our youth. Oregon ranks among the first in the nation for our houseless youth population. HB 2454 and HB 2456 provide \$6.25 M to support host home providers across Oregon, a model with a strong national reputation, for which Oregon is considered a leader. Host Homes provide youth with long-term housing support as well as a stable home, mentorship, and support system while they attend school. HB 2454 and HB 2456 also provide \$12.5 M to expand or enhance existing shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, mental health/substance use services, and other transitional housing options for houseless youth. These bills will also dedicate funding to providing assistance to school-aged youth and families to prevent evictions or rapidly rehouse them if they do become houseless.

***Houseless children are 5 times as likely to miss school because of safety concerns, are 4 times as likely to be sick and experience food insecurity outside of school, and often suffer from emotional and physical stress due to instability and chronically unmet basic human needs. Every year, we serve several hundred students who are making it day to day without a parent or legal guardian. We know the harsh reality that LGBTQIA+ and pregnant or parenting youth are 9 times more likely than their peers to become homeless. The most disturbing statistic of all is that homeless youth are 7 times more likely to attempt suicide than their non-homeless peers.***

In the United States, half of homeless adults first experienced houselessness in their youth. We know that by investing in services for this population that we can and will deter lifetimes of

housing instability and homelessness. ***Earning a high school diploma is the number one thing preventing homeless youth from becoming homeless adults.*** Every child and young adult deserves to have access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive.

HB 2454 and 2456 ensure that is a reality for our young Oregonians experiencing houselessness.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

***Fallon Stewart***

Program Officer

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