

**DEB PATTERSON
STATE SENATOR/SENADORA ESTATAL
DISTRICT 10/DISTRITO 10**



OREGON STATE SENATE/SENADO DEL ESTADO DE OREGON

Chair Dexter, Vice Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today to express my support for HB 2456.

The main school districts in Senate District 10 are the Salem-Keizer School District and Central School District. According to the Oregon Department of Education, in the 2019-2020 school year, the most recent data available, 1117 students in the Salem-Keizer School District reported experiencing homelessness, and over 200 reported they were houseless *and* separated from their parents or guardians. In Central School District, 60 students reported experiencing houselessness, and 24 identified as unaccompanied houseless youth.

There are nearly 1200 students in my district alone who identified themselves as unhoused in the 2019-2020 school year. This number may well have increased since then, as many Oregonians' lives were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These students come to school exhausted, if they can make it at all. Many likely haven't had breakfast and won't have money for lunch. Between 40 and 60% of them will return to their families and be met with physical abuse. 20-40% will be met with sexual abuse. I cannot begin to imagine the physical and mental toll it takes on anyone to be homeless, let alone homeless in an abusive household with no way out.

Every day we do not act, we are failing our children and the future of our state. Oregon has the highest rate of youth houselessness in the United States, and these numbers have likely increased through the financial and emotional turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HB 2456 would allocate \$12.5 million to expand grants for the Youth Experiencing Houselessness Program, as well as \$6.25 million for host home programming. The bill would also establish a new emergency fund to prevent evictions and rapidly rehouse youth and their families.

This bill is not a cure-all, but even if it only helps a handful of students, it will be worth it. We must use every tool in our tool box to help these thousands of children who desperately need us to step up for them. I urge your support of HB 2456.

Thank you,

Deb Patterson