

TO: House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
FROM: Sammi Teo, Public Policy Advocate
RE: Support for HB 2454 & 2456
DATE: January 31, 2023



Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and members of the committee,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes. We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today; and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty. We have the opportunity to rebuild and emerge stronger so that we can end hunger for good in our communities. This is our moment to embrace our shared values and take bold action in support of *all* Oregonians.

Food security and stable housing go hand-in-hand.

Stable housing can be a key determinant of whether a child will have consistent access to enough food. The [Family Options Study](#) shows that providing any type of housing can begin to curb the level of food insecurity a family faces.¹ **Youth experiencing houselessness (YEH) are at a significantly higher risk of food insecurity** than their housed peers. They face additional barriers to accessing food programs due to factors such as high mobility, lack of transportation, and lack of support services. YEH also suffer significantly higher rates of morbidity and mortality than their housed peers, in part because when faced with a lack of options, they're often forced to make risky decisions in order to eat. Ensuring youth have access to stable support services is a critical part of the solution to ensure kids have a safe place to call home and enough food to eat.

Oregon's youth are struggling with severe rates of houselessness.

Oregon ranks first in the country for youth houselessness. In the 2021-2022 school year, there were 18,358 youth experiencing houselessness identified by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Youth houselessness in Oregon rose 32% as a result of the 2008 recession, and we expect similar outcomes as a result of the economic downturn, as well as the impacts of the wildfires Oregon has experienced recently.

Nationally, marginalized identities and communities are disproportionately represented among this population:

- Black youth are 83% more likely to experience houselessness
- Hispanic youth are 32% more likely to experience houselessness
- LGBTQIA+ youth are 120% more likely to experience houselessness

¹ [How Stable, Affordable Housing Can Help Tackle Food Insecurity](#). 2019.

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We need to invest in services that uplift our houseless youth.

The number 1 indicator of adult houselessness is youth houselessness. **Providing services for unaccompanied houseless youth keeps youth out of a lifetime of homelessness.** Additionally, according to a [2009 study](#) from Portland State University and Pacific University, for every \$1 invested in Unaccompanied Houseless Youth (UHY), Oregon saves \$4 down the road. Most importantly, Oregon's youth deserve a robust continuum of services to keep them cared for, supported, and safe.

This is why Oregon Food Bank supports [HB 2454](#) and [HB 2456](#), which provide funding for Oregon's Unaccompanied Houseless Youth (General Fund):

- \$6.25m to expand and support Oregon's host home provider network across the state and ensure host home programming that provides a supportive network for youth: a home, food, and a family.
 - Host homes provide youth with long-term housing support as well as a stable home, mentorship, and support system while they attend school.
- \$12.5m to expand Oregon's shelter and support services: enhancing existing facilities, ensuring funding for outreach, culturally specific services, behavioral health services, and other transitional housing options.
- Supplementary funds in an OHCS Eviction Diversion and Prevention Program (ORE-DAP) account dedicated to providing assistance to school-aged youth and families experiencing or at risk of houselessness.

These bills provide a critical step in the right direction to addressing Oregon's youth houselessness crisis, and in ensuring that every child in Oregon has access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive.

We urge you to support HB 2454 and HB 2456.

Thank you very much.

