

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

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) would like to thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. In addition to the work of our member congregations and denominations around the state, EMO itself serves 17,000 Oregonians every year through our direct service programs - including Second Home, our host home program for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. We know that the Legislature has made previous investments in services and support for youth experiencing homelessness in the 2020 and 2021 Legislative Sessions. We are once again coming to the Legislature to ask you to join us in supporting essential services for youth in Oregon.

Oregon is still in the top five of states with the highest numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth across the country and over 8,000 youth in Oregon are in need of safe housing. We also know that youth with marginalized identities are at a greater risk of experiencing homelessness — with Hispanic youth, Black youth, LGBT+ youth, and youth without a high school diploma being the most at risk. We can and should do more to help the young people of Oregon.

House Bill 2454 and 2456 push back against these immoral and costly statistics, increasing support for a network of services and housing approaches using the existing Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program through ODHS. \$6.25 million will go to support host home providers across Oregon. Host homes provide youth with long-term housing support, a support system, and mentorship as they attend school. We have proven this model to work through Second Home, as students housed in the program consistently graduate from high school at a rate of 90 to 95 percent— compared to a graduation rate of 55 percent for unhoused youth. Knowing that youth can benefit from a wide variety of services, \$12.5 million will also be put towards expanding or enhancing existing shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, mental health/substance use services, and other transitional housing options for youth experiencing homelessness. Finally, this bill will also provide essential emergency funding to help prevent homelessness in the first place through providing families and school-aged youth with funding to avoid evictions or find housing as soon as possible.

In working with Representative Reynolds, other legislative offices, and our community partners,, you have before you a bill that uses existing programs to increase investments for youth who are out of school, and to serve youth who have managed to stay in school while experiencing homelessness. We are called to stand with these young people and we ask that you join us in helping the youth of Oregon thrive by supporting House Bill 2454 and 2456.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon