

Dear House Committee On Housing and Homelessness,

I am the Homelessness Prevention Specialist of Boys & Girls Aid. I am writing today to ask you to support the comprehensive homeless bill HB2001.

On the streets of cities and towns across Oregon, thousands of young people find themselves in a position where they are without a safe or permanent home and left to fend for themselves. During any given year, more than 22,000 Oregon Public School students ranging in age from three to 18 lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Figures like these are often conservative estimates because they do not include young adults (between the ages of 18 and 24), or the many young people who are not involved in the public school system, who do not seek help, or who disappear. Oregon's youth are also struggling with mental health and/or substance use that will—without intervention—eventually require a higher level of care, including services that are more costly.

For over 135 years, Boys & Girls Aid has provided youth with supports and connections that last a lifetime. Currently BGA provides a comprehensive continuum of care for houseless youth in Washington County. These services range from prevention case management, family mediation, shelter, educational re-engagement, mental health services, transitional living, and supportive housing services. Our biggest programs include the only youth shelter in the county, host homes for unaccompanied homeless youth, a rental complex for youth aging out of foster care, and supportive housing case management. We recently launched mediation services and have expanded our housing services.

This funding will allow us to expand and fortify our host home network to provide support that meets the great need in Washington County. We will be able to provide more services across the continuum of care. **As someone who has worked with houseless youth at multiple agencies, I have seen first-hand how impactful host home models are, especially at keeping youth from becoming street entrenched and system impacted. This bill is vital for the future of Oregonians.** Being homeless as a youth is the strongest predictor of long-term adult homelessness. Therefore, the best way to reduce adult homelessness is to target efforts at eliminating youth homelessness.

Thank you for all you for our community and thank you for considering my request. Please contact me if you have any questions.

**Willow Grace Eckmayer
Boys & Girls Aid
Homelessness Prevention Specialist**