

March 2, 2023

Joint Subcommittee on Transportation & Economic Development
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: SB 5511, Appropriates moneys from General Fund to OHCS for biennial expenses
Testimony for Public Hearing on March 2, 2023

Dear Committee Members,

The city of Waterloo respectfully requests your support of SB 5511 be contingent upon the Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) Department's budget being required to directly, and annually, provide funding to each city in Oregon to address and prevent homelessness.

Oregon's homelessness crisis is unprecedented. If this humanitarian disaster is to be rapidly and proportionally addressed, the state must reconsider how funds are implemented and how resources can be directed to reach all Oregonians. The current system of competitive grants and new reliance on continuums of care is fragmented, inequitable, and ignores the front-line response work happening on the ground in cities today. When faced with a crisis of this magnitude, it is critical that the State support the work being done day-in-and-out, on the ground in cities. A direct and collaborative partnership between the state and its 241 cities is critical to Oregon's response.

Every corner of this state, every city in this state, has a resident who is either experiencing homelessness or is so unstably housed they are one emergency away from losing their home. The OHCS budget should reflect this painful reality and ensure that cities are provided direct funding to quickly deploy resources, in coordination with county and provider partners, to make meaningful advancements not just in addressing homelessness, but in preventing it as well.

The homeless crisis is impacting Waterloo. The city of Waterloo is experiencing serious disruptions in its community due to the lack of housing and assisted services needed to address the root causes of homelessness. As a small city of a few hundred people, Waterloo does not have funds in its budget to provide any services surrounding homelessness at the city level.

One of our cities' most frequent issues is people who have other families living in campers as temporary housing. Waterloo only has approximately 100 or so houses in its community and it has a significant number of its community members living in campers or having combined multiple families into a single-family residence. Many residents are unstably housed and experience extreme rent burden.

Waterloo requires sustained state funding to both prevent and respond to homelessness. The state's funding will help stabilize housing in Waterloo, provide services to people experiencing homelessness, and support a small city with little discretionary funding. Local leaders in

Waterloo cannot do this work alone – the fiscal impact of providing services to its homeless residents or responding to the unintended consequences of being homeless (campsite remediation) to a city with a budget the size of Waterloo’s is simply too great.

Providing each city direct funding ensures two things. First, it allows for a more rapid deployment of solutions to address and prevent homelessness. Second, it ensures state resources are reaching Oregonians in all communities. Annual funding enables cities, in partnership with counties and providers, to effectively plan their community response, commit to specific outcomes, and clearly measure and communicate on local progress towards those outcomes. One-and-done funding is just not effective or realistic.

Cities are frontline workers in our state’s homelessness crisis, As frontline workers, cities know where resources are lacking and where and how programs can be launched to provide the most efficient and direct impact to the Oregonians who are not being reached under the current approach of competitive grants and indirect funding.

The city of Waterloo strongly encourages the Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development to pass SB 5511, with an amendment that directly, and annually, allocates funding from OHCS to each city in Oregon.

Sincerely,
Mayor Justin Cary
City of Waterloo