
March 7, 2023

Senator Aaron Woods, Co-Chair
Representative David Gomberg, Co-Chair
Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for HB 5019 including for \$33.6 million in Homelessness Prevention funds

Dear Co-Chairs Woods, Co-Chair Gomberg and Members of the Committee:

We are writing on behalf of Multnomah County in support of HB 5019 to provide critical emergency funding as a bridge to investments in the next biennium. HB 5019 infuses resources quickly into our communities to:

- Prevent homelessness;
- Rehouse people experiencing homelessness; and
- Build and preserve more affordable housing units statewide

Specifically, we submit this testimony in support of an investment of \$33.6 million in emergency rent assistance and eviction prevention funding to prevent homelessness.

Preventing homelessness needs to be our shared top priority and this bill contains a set of critical emergency investments that respond to the eviction and housing crisis that has become dire this fiscal year with the sunseting of pandemic era eviction protections and waning of emergency rent assistance funding..

We are extremely grateful to Governor Kotek, legislative leadership, and this committee for recognizing the importance of moving swiftly with an urgent homelessness package to begin to address immediate needs.

\$33.6 million in funding for emergency rent assistance and eviction prevention to community action agencies and culturally specific programs across the state is an essential element of homelessness prevention. These funds are necessary because of our high rate of homelessness, low availability and high cost of rental housing, chronic disparities in homeownership, and the economic uncertainty that Oregon renters continue to live under.

Pandemic emergency rent assistance funding was a critical and effective strategy to prevent homelessness due to eviction and to house those without stable housing. Those dollars are waning (and are soon to be entirely spent out) and, with pandemic eviction protections fully phased out, Oregon has seen a drastic increase in evictions. According to a study from PSU, "Eviction rates fell close to zero in the early months of the pandemic and rose to over 50% of historical average in July 2021, towards the end of the CDC Moratorium, surpassing historical average in June, August, and September of 2022." With even higher rent due to increases of up to 14.6%, we expect this number to continue to increase.

We are facing an extreme housing crisis in our state, with unprecedented levels of need in urban and rural areas across the state. This investment in emergency rent assistance and eviction prevention would prevent homelessness for 8,750 households across the state.

Oregon is 4th in the nation of people per capita experiencing homelessness, according to the most recent national study¹. Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes. According to the state economist, more than 50% of Oregon renters do not have enough money left over for food, medicine, and basic necessities. That means too many Oregon families are living on the edge and are one missed paycheck, high health care or car repair bill, or other setback away from losing their housing. That plays out in Oregon eviction court rooms every day, where more than 86% of all court evictions are due to a missed rent payment. The situation is more serious for Black Oregonians, who are 30% less likely to be homeowners and more likely to be renters due to the legacy of historic policies that blocked Black people from purchasing and owning property in our state.²

Rental assistance keeps people housed, keeps families stable, keeps children in the classroom, and prevents homelessness. This is a smart investment today that will avoid higher human, financial, and societal costs in the next biennium and well beyond.

We strongly urge passage of HB 5019 and \$33.6 million in emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention resources.

¹<https://www.opb.org/article/2021/03/19/federal-analysis-shows-oregons-homeless-population-in-decline-prior-to-pandemic/>

² <https://www.koin.com/news/oregon/the-black-homeownership-gap-in-oregon/>