



Date: March 28th, 2023
To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Crystalyn Black, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Stable Housing for Children & Youth Experiencing Homelessness, SB 658

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 658. My name is Crystalyn Black, I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life to thrive across Oregon and SW Washington.

When a family faces high mobility and limited resources, we often see increased numbers of learning disabilities, behavior and or developmental challenges, and lower achievement scores. This indicates that those who are vulnerable to economic shock need support the most. Access to housing is an economic issue felt acutely for Black people who have faced structural racism and have been barred from accessing equitable housing and opportunities for economic mobility. According to the Recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities in Oregon report to the Oregon State Legislature, the data shows that in Oregon, "people who identify as Black or African American are 2% of the total population, 4% of those in poverty, and 6% of those experiencing homelessness."¹ This indicates that the percentage of Black people experiencing homelessness is 3 times higher than other populations. According to the 2017 survey conducted by SchoolHouse Connection in the U.S., "20% of high school students experiencing homelessness identify as Black or African-American, compared to 15% of all high school students. 31.7% of high school students experiencing homelessness identify as Hispanic or Latino, compared to 22.6% of all high school students."² Additionally, the report states that Black high school students, in particular, are 2.67 times more likely to experience homelessness than white high school students."³ When looking at these factors, Black homelessness youth are at risk of homelessness, especially in Oregon.

Our youth need access to safe, affordable, and stable housing because housing displacement can lead to "lifelong and multigenerational consequences".⁴ Oregon youth, especially unaccompanied youth, are often invisible and underserved. According to the 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, "6% of the national total of unaccompanied youth are Oregonians."⁵ "A powerful tool used to measure homelessness in youth is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which tracks the number of homeless youths in school. The data gathered as a result of this Act indicates that more than 18,000 youth in K-12 experienced homelessness in the 2021-2022 school year."⁶ Thousands of youths are experiencing unstable living conditions that cross over into their school life, which impacts their academic success.

¹ [Findings and Recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities in Oregon](#), 2022, pg. 15.

² SchoolHouse Connection, "[Student Homelessness: Lessons from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#)", 2017.

³ SchoolHouse Connection, "[Student Homelessness: Lessons from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#)", 2017.

⁴ AJAMA Pediatr, "[Association of Eviction with Adverse Birth Outcomes Among Women in Georgia, 2000 to 2016](#)", 2021.

⁵ HUD, "[2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR\) to Congress](#)", 2022, pg. 52.

⁶ Oregon Department of Education, "[Oregon Statewide Report Card 2021-2022](#)" 2022, pg. 5.



Often the destabilizing factors which may have pushed a youth towards houselessness are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as financial stressors, domestic violence, parental substance abuses, and neglect etc. creates a trauma that is compounded by houselessness. Exposure to ACEs can lead to toxic stress, disrupt the brain development, and lower a student's performance in school. In fact, if a student has higher than a 3 ACE score they are "2.5 times more likely to fail a grade, are up to 32 times more likely to be identified with learning and behavioral problems; and are more likely to be suspended and expelled"⁷. It is important to address the traumas faced and to provide stable homes for our children so that they have the tools they need to thrive.

Oregon must expand services for houseless youth by providing culturally-specific, trauma-informed housing and wraparound services for K-12 houseless youth. Senate Bill 658 proposes a pilot program that allocates funding to schools that have a significant houseless population so they can provide direct assistance and support to students. By doing so, this bill may increase access to schools for students facing homelessness and improve academic outcomes, especially for Black youth who are at higher risk for houselessness, and their academic success being impacted.

The Urban League of Portland urges your support for Senate Bill 658.

Respectfully,

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⁷ Mary Ann Wolf and Elizabeth DeKonty, "[Perspective | Supporting trauma-informed practices in schools](#)", 2022.