

Submitter: Valdez Bravo
On Behalf Of: Self
Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness
Measure: HB3503

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Valdez Bravo, an Oregon native of LatinX and Standing Rock Sioux descent.

While I am writing on behalf of myself as an individual, my testimony today in support of HB 3503 is informed by my experience as a US Army veteran; as a masters trained health care professional of over 25 years; as a public health leader in Multnomah County which encompasses the Portland-metropolitan area, and as a landlord.

I'd like to frame my remarks in the context of Governor Kotek's Top 3 priorities: Housing, Education, and Behavioral Health. These priorities are all of course, interconnected.

HOUSING

From my time in the VA, I saw the challenges that America's veterans have securing housing even with the benefits and eligibility afforded them by virtue of their past military service. Studies show that 1 in 8 houseless people are veterans. Even with HUD-VASH programs, providing vouchers to veterans for housing solutions, we at the VA always struggled to distribute all vouchers available due to the lack of affordable housing.

A root cause is the lack of housing in Oregon combined with the fact that rising rents that are too high for potential renters to afford. Statistics from the Oregon Housing Alliance in 2020 show that one out of every four renters in Oregon pay more than 50% of their income on rent. Additionally, three of four renters with extremely low income pay more than 50% of their income on rent. The pandemic exacerbated this and continued housing shortages combined with inflation means that rents are even higher today.

EDUCATION

Studies show that 1 out of every 27 students faced homelessness in 2019-2020. To put a number on that, we are talking about approximately 21,591 children. Again, these numbers are pre-pandemic and likely even higher today. In thinking about recent news reports about all of the children in Oregon who have "dropped out" of the

education system, one can only surmise that the housing crisis affecting their young lives is a very real contributing factor. Even for those who are still enrolled in school, children without stable housing cannot thrive and learn if they are not housed. High rents and housing barriers mean that children are not stable and not able to self-actualize.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Every day in my role as an administrator in Oregon's largest health department, I see the challenges of homelessness. We know that stable housing is a key component of Oregonian's ability to recover from substance use disorder; heal from post-traumatic stress disorder; manage serious mental illness; and achieve a level of mental health and/or behavioral health. While behavioral health challenges often lead to being houseless, not having access to housing post-treatment is a very real factor to not being able to achieve a stable state of mental well-being. Housing is an upstream solution to mental and behavioral health.

Rents have a very real impact on this. Studies show that for every \$100 increase in rents in a community, there is a 9% increase in homelessness. Also, for those who are housed but struggle to pay rent, perhaps due to an unexpected curveball in life, studies also show that between 12-37% of evictions result in homelessness .

A STRUCTURAL SOLUTION - LIFT THE BAN ON LOCAL RENT CONTROL

In addition to Governor Kotek's call to action for Oregon communities to work together to build over 30,000 housing units over the next three years, we need to make sure that the housing already in existence is accessible to Oregon renters. Lifting the ban on local rent control will increase the likelihood that Oregonians remain within reach of being able to afford rent and keep a roof over their head. Veterans will remain housed. Children will be housed and a stable living situation will ensure continuity of education and success. Less people will be homeless.

Please support the Governor's priorities and lift the ban on local rent control.

Valdez G. Bravo, FACHE
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