



12 February 2024

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon Legislature

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jimmy Jones, and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency in Salem. We serve low-income residents of Marion, Polk and nine other counties across Oregon. Annually we provide more than \$70 million in services and direct client assistance for housing, homelessness, energy and weatherization, and early learning programs to more than 60,000 Oregonians in poverty, in addition to a range of emergency services that shelter the homeless and serve wildfire victims. I also serve as the Vice President for Legislative Affairs at the Community Action Partnership of Oregon, sit on the Housing Committee of the Racial Justice Council and the House Bill 2100 Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities, and Chair the Legislature's Joint Task Force on Hospital Discharge. I am also a Member of the Board at the Oregon Alliance for runaway and homeless youth. For many years, I have been an advocate for the homeless and housing unstable residents of our state.

On behalf of MWVCAA and the unsheltered community of Oregon, we write in support of the -3 Amendments to **Senate Bill 1530**, which will provide additional sheltering investments to our financially strained and under-capacity shelter stock in Oregon. We at MWVCAA are a state and national leader in unsheltered homeless services. We operate two seventy-five-bed Project Turnkey motels, the ARCHES Inn and the ARCHES Lodge, along with the 75-bed Community Action Navigation Center, a 36-bed veteran shelter, and two 10-bed runaway and homeless youth shelters (David's House and Taylor's House). We also operate a very large, exceptionally low-barrier Day Center for adults, a second Day Center for homeless youth, and a wide array of modern data-informed outreach services.

SB 1530 provides critical additional support for Oregon's homeless response, including:

- \$65 million for emergency shelter operation;
- \$40 million for homeless prevention through the Oregon Eviction Diversion and Prevention (OR-DAP) program and the Eviction Prevention Rapid Response (EPRR) program; and
- \$2 million for emergency warming and cooling shelters funded by the Oregon Department of Human Services.

These are all vital additions to a strained sheltering system, which is stepping down from COVID-era financial support at a time when Oregon's homeless population grew 22 percent between 2020-2022, and another 12 percent in 2023. That growth will accelerate in the years to come as the full social and economic consequences of the pandemic years play out.

We offer not only our support for the framework, but our hope that (given how fast the homeless crisis is changing) Oregon Housing and Community Services will have appropriate flexibility to allocate and distribute these funds quickly and efficiently in a strategic fashion. Funded

and functioning shelter stock is critical in protecting not only the lives but also the dignity of our neighbors living outside. We strongly urge, too, much greater flexibility in allowable costs and work design. The most recent \$24.1 million in OHCS emergency shelter funding gave us no ability to charge administrative costs to the grant, no ability to provide housing-focused services, no ability to sub-contract with key local partners, and no ability to support our smaller and culturally specific partner agencies. These are vital tools for nonprofits in Oregon, as we look to maximize state investments.

The past two years, in particular, have shown that some shelter investments were not maximized to their full potential. We hope that the Committee will tighten language around eligible activities, encourage OHCS to work directly with providers themselves, and do its due diligence to make sure that awardees have both the capacity and the performance history to do this work well. The sheltering crisis is so great, and our resources so limited, that we cannot allow inefficiency and waste to keep us from the greatest efficacy the investment can provide. There are hundreds of entities across Oregon who know how to do this work, and do it well. We hope that Oregon Housing and Community Services will seek their counsel, consider their local expertise, yet also demand performance, transparency, and accountability.

Oregon Senate Bill 850, in 2021, created the first statewide homeless death reporting structure in America. We now have two years' worth of data on the consequences of unsheltered homelessness in Oregon. In 2022, 538 unhoused Oregonians died, including disproportionate numbers of Black and Native American Oregonians. In 2023, that death toll increased by 99 persons, to 637 total, including 88 persons under the age of 34. In Marion-Polk, for years, our average age of death for a homeless person has been 52 years of age. They are dying of all the same things that you and I are dying from, only 15 years earlier. We simply must do better.

Senate Bill 1530 gives us the tools we need to reduce the number of folks outside, shelter more than ever before, and prevent needless painful deaths and enormous suffering. Out of all of the public policy conversations we have had in the past five years, SB 1530 is the state's first major, sustained commitment to dignity for our unsheltered neighbors. Please seize this opportunity and act quickly to pass SB 1530 out of Committee, and work toward its final enactment.

Respectfully,



Jimmy Jones
Executive Director