

February 15, 2024

Senator Fred Girod, Co-Chair  
Representative Paul Holvey, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Girod and Holvey and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to support for funding the United Way of the Mid-Willamette Valley Cottages United Project. The project, aimed at seniors 55 and up, will bring 25 low-income cottages to the Salem-Keizer area. These cottages will have a maximum monthly rent of \$500.00, meet building, energy, and ADA standards, serve to revitalize the neighborhood where they are located, and have the potential to be replicated in our city, county, and state.

For seniors, affordable housing is a critical need in Salem/Keizer:

- According to the 2023 PIT count, Salem had 1488 homeless individuals. Of that, 429 were aged 50 and over. This was the largest group in this count.
- 63% of older adults, 55 and older, earn below \$35,000 a year.
- In the past 30 years, the number of people 55 and older experiencing homelessness has jumped from 11% to 50%.
- In 2023, the average social security benefit was \$1782 per month.
- The average rent in Salem is between \$1100-\$1400 per month.
- For older adults, financial insecurity is a barrier to stable housing, and house instability significantly impacts health.

The need for affordable housing for seniors is part of a bigger approach to addressing homelessness in our state.

Having served on the joint Marion and Polk County task force on homelessness, it was very apparent that housing is needed for all sectors. Seniors are one of our fastest-growing homeless population segments.

I respectfully request that you approve funding for the United Way of the Mid-Willamette Cottages United project. This funding will create a real-world solution to our senior homelessness issue and a long-term replicable project.

Sincerely,

Ronald Hays  
Rural Marion County