



February 16, 2024

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Capital Construction  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE, Room H-178, Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Senator Girod, Representative Holvey, and Committee Members:

*Campus may be an everyday word for young adults on the academic track. On the workforce pathway, however, it is rare. With State support this session, for Central Oregon that is about to change.*

Heart of Oregon Corps trains tomorrow's workforce today and invests in youth's well-being and community-connectedness. As the Oregon Legislature focuses on addressing the housing crisis in our state, Heart of Oregon Corps is uniquely positioned to help both fronts, training a construction workforce ready for employment in the construction trades, and the construction of affordable housing units.

Operating for 24 years, HOC focuses on engaging 16-24-year-old "Opportunity Youth" who are disconnected from school and work, in addition to minority, rural, and other youth experiencing barriers such as low income, foster care, court-involvement, and housing instability. Our six programs provide training in four areas—conservation, construction, childcare, and customer service. Participants earn wages or stipends, scholarships, workforce certifications, diplomas/GEDs, and in one program, even Oregon BOLI pre-apprenticeship certification.

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony in support of the "Heart of Oregon Corps" capital project under consideration in HB5201. This project will create a vibrant centralized campus in Redmond, Oregon. The 3.4-acre campus will include renovating an existing manufacturing building and covered bays and constructing a new adjacent facility. HOC's unique needs for classroom and industrial training spaces, comprehensive parking and equipment infrastructure, and vibrant community spaces are met at this site.

In 2022, HOC was fortunate to be awarded a \$2M capital project grant from the Oregon State Legislature and has since raised \$1.8M more. As the project developed over the past couple of years, HOC is seeking additional support for this project for three specific reasons (1) the project aligns with the current session's housing supply and behavioral health goals, (2) the increase in costs from the original budget due to unprecedented and unanticipated inflation and a new opportunity to purchase vs lease the project site, and (3) to expedite the timeline for completion and deliver the quickest impacts on housing supply via youth workforce development training in Central Oregon, while turning our fundraising focus from infrastructure to capacity and maximizing the impacts of the new campus.

Our budget is \$9.5M which includes increases of \$1.5M for land purchase and \$2.3M due to inflation, labor and materials increases, and additional soft costs.

A \$3M award from the State Legislature would close the current funding gap and ensure funds to expedite this project to begin construction 4th Quarter 2024. This would allow HOC to more quickly enhance youth workforce development services throughout Central Oregon and would prevent costly fundraising delays in the construction timeline. Failing that, a partial state award of \$2M would solely mitigate the inflationary and cost increase factors.

The organizations listed below enthusiastically endorse our vision for a centralized campus and recognize its profound impact on youth workforce development in Central Oregon. Please see the compelling letters of support they submitted with our comprehensive application. This project boasts robust backing from the community.



Thank you for your consideration of our request. Comprehensive youth-centered workforce training, delivered in trauma-informed spaces, are needed more than ever during this post-pandemic labor-shortage era. HOC's new Central Campus responds to those needs. Moreover, this campus concept comes at a perfect time to provide a dramatic inflection point in stemming the decline in young adult workforce interest and engagement, and carries the potential to be a model for other organizations enjoined in this mission field.

Sincerely,

Laura M Handy  
Executive Director