

Submitter: Gwen Wolfenbarger
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3079

Chair Hartman, Vice Chair Nguyen, Vice Chair Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. As a board-certified music therapist at Cedar Hills Hospital, I am dedicated to serving adults in the Multnomah, Washington, and surrounding counties suffering from mental illness and substance abuse, many of whom experience these symptoms as consequences of lifelong housing instability. I am writing to you today to advocate in support of HB 3079 and provide and ensure a full continuum of services for Oregon's unaccompanied houseless youth, those who are not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians, and who are homeless.

I hope you will join me in affirming housing as a basic human right for all Oregonians, especially our youth. Oregon has the 4th highest number of houseless youth in the nation.

HB 3079 provides funding support for homeless youth services across Oregon through the Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program, a model with a strong national reputation, for which Oregon is considered a leader. This Program provides youth with long-term housing support as well as a stable home, mentorship, and support system while they attend school. This legislation also provides financing to expand or enhance existing shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, mental health/substance use services, and other transitional housing options for houseless youth. These bills will also dedicate funding to providing assistance to school-aged youth and families to prevent evictions or rapidly rehouse them if they do become houseless.

In the United States, half of homeless adults first experienced homelessness in their youth. We know that by investing in services for this population that we can and will deter lifetimes of housing instability and homelessness. Every child and young adult deserves to have access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive. HB 3079 ensures that is a reality for our young Oregonians experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Gwen Wolfenbarger, MT-BC