



House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

February 17, 2025

**HB 3527, Establishes the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund**

Testimony submitted by:

**Britt Conroy**

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Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO)

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald and Members of the Committee,

My name is Britt Conroy, and I serve as Director of Public Policy for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. EMO is a statewide association of congregations, denominations and interfaith partners, connecting us with 750 faith communities across the state.

We also serve communities across Oregon through our seven direct service programs, including programs that support refugees and immigrants, food-insecure people through the state's largest food pantry, low-income people living with HIV, unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

It is with these Oregonians in mind that EMO fully supports HB 3527, which would establish the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund.

Every month, thousands of Oregonians have their utilities shut off due to an inability to pay. When water or electricity is shut off, these homes are considered inhabitable, leading to the very real threat of eviction. These neighbors move from being housed, living in deep poverty, to facing homelessness.

EMO has had the privilege of partnering with many of you to address youth homelessness through the ODHS Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program, and to *prevent* family homelessness in the first place through an OHCS emergency housing assistance program created in 2023.

As many of you know, when a household with school-aged children has a utility shut off, those children are referred to their school district's McKinney-Vento homelessness liaison – overburdened, nearly totally state-funded positions who bring together teachers, counselors, nonprofit partners and others to stabilize families.

HB 3527 is needed - *and* this topic forces us to ask uncomfortable questions:

- Under what sense of morality do we, as a society, cut off water to the homes of poor Oregonians?
- How is our community made stronger when an unpaid water bill leads to homelessness?
- How are our struggling schools and the young people we ask them to educate better off when precious resources are spent finding ways to turn a family's water back on or finding students new housing after their families have been evicted?

EMO urges this committee to stand with low-income Oregonians, with our schools and with those working tirelessly to address and prevent homelessness by supporting HB 3527.

Thank you.