

LISA REYNOLDS, MD
STATE SENATOR
District 17



OREGON STATE SENATE

February 25th, 2025

House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

Chair Hartman, Vice Chairs Nguyen and Scharf, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Christopher McMorran and I serve as Chief of Staff to State Senator Lisa Reynolds. Senator Reynolds represents West Portland, Cathedral Park, and communities in Northeast Washington County. And I'm not sure if we've ever mentioned this before, but Senator Reynolds is also a practicing pediatrician serving children and families in her district. She was really hoping to be here this morning but – ironically – had a doctor's appointment!

But now to the bill: It is both of her professional experiences – as a policymaker and as a pediatrician – that brings Senator Reynolds to be in strong support of HB 3079. This bill is the crucial next step in our state's efforts to address the tragic epidemic of youth homelessness.

Let's be clear: no one in Oregon should experience homelessness. But above all, no *child* should ever experience it. Every child and youth deserves a safe, stable, and - as we've seen the weather recently - *warm* place to rest their head at night.

Something the Senator talks a lot about a lot in her legislative and pediatric work is the importance of upstream solutions and upstream investments. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the saying goes. By tackling the root causes of an issue, we can improve the lives of Oregonians and save state resources in the process. How is that relevant here? Because youth homelessness is far and away the #1 predictor of adult homelessness. If we want to address the statewide crisis of adult homelessness, there is no better place to start than at the source: youth homelessness.

Today, we know that being homeless for as little as three months as a youth often leads to chronic adult homelessness. Senator Reynolds knows from her pediatric practice that the trauma inflicted on youth can lead to stratospheric costs for the state if we don't catch them early.

Luckily, our state has taken very meaningful action and made critical investments to address this in recent years. We've gone from \$400,000 to our communities just a few years ago to around \$25.5 million in the last biennium, which is fantastic. This money is making real positive impacts

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on youth homelessness in Oregon. Senator Reynolds is very proud that the OHCS program to prevent family homelessness that we created in 2023 is making a difference, including through direct financial assistance to youth. But now, in 2025, we are intent on expanding eligibility for this program from only families with school-aged children to families with children from *birth* through grade twelve. This helps us directly attack those upstream problems at their earliest possible hour. As Senator Reynolds often quotes, the demographic at highest risk of eviction in this country is *babies*. It is crucial that this eligibility be expanded to the critical first years of life to be most effective.

There are two additional issues that this bill will help us address: First, nearly half of Oregon's counties are left with no wraparound services. Second, many of the programs are still facing an existential crisis as costs and workforce expenses are going up faster than funding.

Why is this so important? Well, because we simply won't solve the adult homeless crisis until we cut off the supply. We won't solve adult homelessness until we solve youth homelessness. This is the most efficient and effective way to cut adult homeless numbers. 85% of youth in these programs go on to never be homeless as adults. That's data that is backed up from research both in Oregon and nationally. And it's a great return on the investment.

Simply put, we can't afford NOT to pass this bill.

Senator Reynolds was happy to be the co-chief of last session's bill, and she is very happy to again be a co-chief on this session's bill. It's a bi-partisan effort that deserves our strong, and immediate support. As she said then and continues to say now, youth homelessness is not a Democratic issue or a Republican issue: It is an issue of our shared humanity. It should be something we can all unite around solving. Senator Reynolds urges your strong support for this bill.

Thank you.

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