

Good morning,

Chair Hartman, and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. My name is Keasha and I am a student at Portland Community College located in the city of Portland, OR. I am speaking today to advocate in support of HB 3079 and to 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.

Growing up no child should ever have the thought in their mind of having to deal with homelessness or having to find their way without a parent. Unfortunately that is what many youth in Oregon go through and I was one of those youth. Growing up jumping from shelter to shelter and not having stability or firm foundation, was the start to a declining downfall at a young age. Not being able to stay in one school for a full year just added to the wall of terror and the thought of what the "Next" step would be. At best, this meant low grades, which have given me gaps in my education that I am still working to overcome, also not being able to establish solid relationships or participate in sports or activities. At worst, in looking for escape and stability, I ran away multiple times, got involved with people who were not great influences, and ended up in the youth judicial systems. While going through this, there were thoughts that no one was on my side, having many people come and go. I was used to figuring things out on my own and not draping over others to help me find my way.

Simply having a stable home has turned things around for me. Most importantly, I was able to stay at one school for my entire high school career. This allowed me to become a fully engaged member of that community, excelling on the basketball team, serving on student leadership, participating in Black student union, joining after school SUN program, and more. Having the opportunities that every youth should get to experience made me feel more comfortable and not having to worry about where my next meal was coming from or the next place I would rest my head was definitely a huge relief. I also grew a strong friend group and support system. I also graduated on time with a high GPA. Today, I'm a full time college student, work as a caregiver, and am able to spend time with friends, do some traveling, and I even bought my own car. Simply having access to a stable home has made all of this possible, and every youth in our state deserves the same opportunity. Food and shelter are basic human needs.

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.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.