

Re: Support for POPs 501 (Shelter); 502 (Re-Housing) and 504 and 505 (Homelessness Prevention Resources) in the OHCS Budget

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, and Co-Vice-Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and Members of the Committee:

With the turbulent shifts in the federal government affecting housing, I am writing in strong support of Policy Option Packages 501, 502, 504 and 505, the Homelessness Shelter, Re-Housing, and Prevention Packages in the Oregon Housing and Community Services Agency Budget. These Policy Option Packages will allow us to continue to provide emergency rent assistance and community-based and culturally specific services which will help prevent eviction and homelessness which are still a critical epidemic as well as continuity of shelter and re-housing services and supports.

Cuts to any of these programs will lead to more unsheltered homelessness in our communities, and more trauma for Oregonians who are struggling. As I'm sure you know, once a person has been evicted, it is nearly impossible to find housing without government assistance. Continuing these programs will save lives and support communities.

Back in 2021, I was living in an apartment and due to COVID, I lost my ability to pay. It wasn't anyone's fault and I managed to struggle through getting through my lease before moving in with a friend. However, the anxiety and grief during that time would have been exasperated had I been thrown out of my house of 15 years into a dangerous situation with little hope of getting a new apartment as getting into housing is ridiculously more expensive than staying in it even with deposits, asks for 2x the rent in income or higher, and rental application fees. I was extremely lucky that I had someone who was able to catch me as well as not having any small children involved. This is not the case for many Oregonians. We need safety nets to help others through a traumatic event that I still consider one of the worst moments of my life.

With one of the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness in the nation, and the highest rate of youth homelessness, Oregon must prioritize funding to strengthen our network of shelters, rehousing assistance, and responsive and supportive services to help our neighbors who have been forced by our housing crisis to live outside.

And we must ensure that prevention resources, including emergency rent assistance, legal assistance, and supportive services, are adequate to prevent more people from falling into homelessness in the first place.

Please support:

Policy Option Package 501: Please maintain shelter and supportive services operations. The ongoing shelter system is critical to providing stability and shelter during extreme weather conditions. Services connect vulnerable populations to vital services that help them transition into stable housing. **\$217 Million**

Policy Option Package 502: Please support re-housing supports. This program provides up to 2 years rental assistance and supports to help people find housing and re-establish stability after experiencing homelessness. **\$188 Million**

Policy Option Packages 504/505: Please replenish funding for proven eviction prevention programs provided by local community organizations that understand local needs, including community action agencies and culturally specific service providers. **\$173.2 Million**

1. **Emergency rent assistance to prevent homelessness: \$109 Million** is the minimum amount of rent assistance necessary to prevent evictions over the next two years. These funds are distributed by community action agencies and community-based and trusted organizations across the state.
2. **Homelessness prevention services: \$63.2 Million** to support housing navigation services, landlord tenant education and outreach, legal services, tenant supports, eviction prevention, tenant advocacy, and rapid rehousing services for tenants who get displaced.

Having access to rent assistance could have helped me out when I was needing to leave my home. Having access to prevention services could have given me more options. I was fortunate enough that I didn't have to use any of the shelters, but so many people do need them. I remember the summer day of 112 degree weather where it was dangerous to even be without air conditioning let alone without shelter. And I remember the ice storm which was already difficult for those of us who were sheltered and deadly for those who weren't.

We can't afford to wait. Our lawmakers must act now to protect our communities, support our providers, and ensure every Oregonian has a stable framework to build their future.

We urge your strong support of these Policy Option Packages. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Oregon communities.

Sincerely,

Nicole