

**Samaritan Health Services**  
2/3/2026

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
900 Court St. NE.  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**RE: Support for Emergency Shelter Funding to Sustain Benton County Capacity**  
Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez;  
Co-Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith;

Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

I would like to offer strong support of Benton County's request for additional state investment to maintain critical emergency and transitional shelter capacity during the **2025–27 biennium**.

We, at Samaritan Health Services, see firsthand that shelter is the primary building block for Oregon's homelessness response system. Stable shelter capacity is essential to the needs of our community. As the regional healthcare provider, we work daily with local shelters to support unhoused patients discharging from the emergency department and assist with medical outreach to those same shelters to address acute and chronic illnesses. Without stable shelters, our community will struggle mightily to address the most basic needs of the most vulnerable members. We often partner with local shelters to create medical respite experiences that are essential to keeping our acute care hospital settings available for those experiencing a healthcare crisis. In short, shelters are essential.

During the 2023–25 biennium, statewide investments through HB 5019 and related initiatives significantly strengthened shelter systems across Oregon. In Benton County alone, shelter-specific funding supported the operation and programming of 241 total shelter beds, including:

- 171 year-round emergency and transitional shelter beds, and
- 70 intermittent emergency beds activated during severe weather conditions.

Unfortunately, reduced funding levels and allocation methodology changes beginning in FY26 have created a significant shortfall. Benton County projects that without an additional **\$1.2 million during the 2025–27 biennium**, up to **60 year-round shelter beds** may be forced to close as early as **April 2026**.

The loss of this shelter capacity would have serious impacts in Benton County, including:

- Reduced access to shelter for individuals currently receiving outreach, navigation, and housing placement support.
- Increased unsheltered homelessness, including among medically and behaviorally vulnerable residents.
- Greater strain on emergency response systems, law enforcement, and hospitals.
- Reduced effectiveness of rehousing and stabilization interventions that depend on shelter availability to succeed.

Samaritan Health Services is committed to working alongside local partners to address homelessness through coordinated, effective local solutions. However, these strategies depend on maintaining the shelter infrastructure that provides immediate safety and a pathway toward permanent housing.

We urge the Legislature to provide the requested level of funding for Benton County to sustain the emergency and transitional shelter beds created in the previous biennium and prevent avoidable system regression.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,



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