



Oregon Commission For Women

Advocating for Equity and Diversity

throughout Oregon

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Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

Testimony in Support of SB 1539

February 14, 2022

Chair Beyer, Vice-Chair Boquist, and Senators Armitage, Findley, and Sollman,

My name is Natasha Haunsperger, Chair of the Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW), and I thank you for the opportunity to provide a written testimony on SB 1539, which addresses youth experiencing homelessness.

1. OCFW works toward economic, social, political, and legal equity for the women of Oregon with particular focus on marginalized and underrepresented women of color. We do this through advocacy, public policy research, leadership development, and partnerships.

2. In our statutory role of bringing equity focus and community voice into Oregon policy making, OCFW strongly supports SB 1539, which provides additional funding to school districts for combatting academic and socio-economic inequities and disparities involving young adults experiencing homelessness.

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The issue of homeless youth should concern every community in Oregon, in both urban and rural settings. It is a multi-dimension problem intersecting public health, criminal justice, social justice, and educational sectors.

The absence of standard living and safety conditions, including educational platform and opportunities, not only robs these impacted youth of a chance for a stable and thriving life, and economic prospects, it also places them at a higher risk of being victimized by criminal



actors, such as human traffickers. Research indicates that homeless youth are at a higher risk of becoming victims of human trafficking by those who exploit and target vulnerable youth.¹ Providing access to education leads to access to stability, personal safety, and mitigating further harm associated with homeless youth survival.

Connecting homeless youth with academic institutions also contributes to our societal efforts to reverse their dehumanized status. We should acknowledge and take ownership of increasing socio-economic barriers and emerging trends underlining homeless causal factors. For example, the 2017 report states: "increasing homelessness in Oregon and other western states is attributed to a lack of sufficient affordable housing to meet the demands of a growing and increasingly mobile population." SB 1539 provides homeless youth impacted by increasing housing crisis with educational opportunity and a path to stability, safety, and resources.² SB 1539 promotes a statewide effort to address complex socio-economic, gender and health inequities, and security-risk factors impacting the lives of homeless youth.

OCFW finds it encouraging to learn that each selected school district will onboard houseless youth in their jurisdictions. In addition, it is promising to learn that school districts will work in concert with specific and appropriate state and community stakeholders and partners to develop a learning environment to reflect ethnic, linguistic, and cultural needs of the impacted students. Finally, as outlined, SB 1539 would allow homeless students to access school districts - structural supports and assistance - services that span from food, transportation, school counselors, the infrastructure that could improve and enhance a student's quality of life.

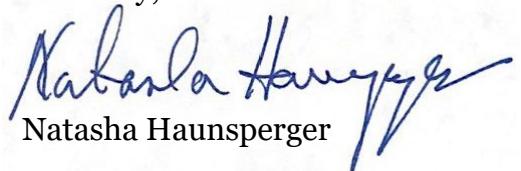
OCFW urges you to adopt SB 1539 because it promotes educational equity and, above all, social justice and advocacy for one of the most vulnerable demographics - homeless/houseless youth.

¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/fact-sheet/overlap-human-trafficking-and-runaway-and-homeless-youth>

² <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/ESEA/McKinney-Vento/Documents/State%20Summary%20Data%20for%20web.pdf>



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Natasha Haunsperger".

Natasha Haunsperger

Chair, Oregon Commission for Women

