

February 27, 2025

Representative Pam Marsh, Chair
House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 3644 – Support

Chair Marsh and Members of the Committee,

Multnomah County supports HB 3644, which would establish a statewide sheltering system for people who are experiencing homelessness, set shared standards for shelter operations, necessary services, and funding streams to support pathways to stable housing. We applaud the work of the Sustainable Shelter Work Group convened by Governor Kotek and Representative Pam Marsh with input and guidance from partners from across Oregon and the resulting report and recommendations published in December 2024.

Homelessness is a housing access problem that is exacerbated by racism and individual life circumstances especially for individuals with behavioral health care needs. The Multnomah County Department of Homeless Services works with county departments and community organizations to increase access to health care, provide outreach, case management, and shelter beds to individuals, families, and youth who would otherwise face uncertain and unsafe circumstances.

We believe every person in our community deserves a safe and secure place to sleep every night. And we know that as of January 2024, the by-name list in Multnomah County identifies at least 5,400 people who are sleeping outside, in vehicles, tents, and makeshift structures. Currently there are 3,400 publicly-funded shelter beds in Multnomah County. We appreciate that this bill recognizes the critical role shelter coupled with the appropriate services plays in the pathway out of homelessness, increases access to care and provides safety off the streets. We look forward to partnering to increase shelter capacity to meet the current and growing need among all household compositions.

Multnomah County, in partnership with other local jurisdictions and community partners, has built a homelessness response system that serves 40 percent of the houseless population in Oregon. We have done so with steady commitment and partnership from the State of Oregon. We support the approach outlined in HB 3644 to define the State's role and the intent to follow local plans, uplift approaches that center racial equity and prioritize behavioral health needs. These approaches align

Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Chair



well with our Homelessness Response Action Plan and its associated Community Sheltering Strategy. We applaud the state's recognition of the need for predictable funding streams to ensure consistently available shelter and needed services.

Multnomah County is facing a considerable budget shortfall in the upcoming fiscal year that jeopardizes services for the most vulnerable. The resulting reductions could mean reduced street outreach and navigation, closing shelter beds, slowing progress on shelter expansion, fewer units of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), and reducing employment and benefit access programs.

While we sheltered or housed nearly 12,000 people in the last year, we recognize that Multnomah County's success depends on partnerships with our sister counties and support from regional jurisdictions and the state. Our response to the growing crisis of homelessness will be strengthened by our work together as outlined in this bill. I urge your support for HB 3644.

Sincerely,



Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Chair

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