



February 5, 2024

Chair Neron, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Wright, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Britt Conroy, and I serve as Public Policy Director at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. EMO's six food, housing and other programs see hundreds of thousands of client visits every year, and we are proud to act as an association of 15 member denominations that represent nearly 750 congregations across the state.

EMO urges this committee to support HB 4079. We applaud this effort to lift the cap on the amount of State School Fund moneys to support students eligible for special education. And we support the bill's provision to provide additional weight in the state school funding formula for students who are homeless.

Oregon has a K-12 homelessness crisis. More than 18,000 K-12 students experienced homelessness during the 2021-2022 school year, giving Oregon one of the worst rates of K-12 homelessness in the United States.

This homelessness crisis most impacts those too often shoved to the margins of our communities: Nationally, Black youth are nearly three times more likely than white youth to experience homelessness nationwide, and about one-third of homeless youth nationally identify as LGBTQ+.¹ Tragically, just 58.6% of Oregon students who experience homelessness graduate from high school, the second-lowest graduation rate among all major demographics tracked by the Oregon Department of Education.²

I will also point out that this bill would complement and bolster other legislative efforts this session to support immigrant, refugee and other newcomer students and families.

HB 4079 represents an opportunity to stand with our state's courageous young people who are houseless, and to support students with disabilities. EMO urges your support of the bill.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Britt Conroy, Director of Public Policy, EMO

¹ National Network for Youth, <https://bit.ly/3GreIJC>

² Oregon Public Broadcasting, <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/02/04/oregon-education-graduation-rate-migrant-immigrant-students-black-native/>