

Good morning, Chair Dexter, Vice Chairs Helfrich and Gamba, and members of the committee. For the record I am Xan Augerot, Benton County Commissioner and Co-Chair of the Association of Oregon Counties' Health & Human Services Steering Committee, representing Oregon's county governments.

I am here today to thank you for your support for this historic fast-track housing package and to offer my insights from a county which is part of the federally-designated "balance of state" continuum of care. We are also a House Bill 4123 coordinated homelessness response pilot.

I have been involved with local initiatives to build capacity along the entire housing continuum since I took office. It is a pressing problem, given that

- Benton County is home to Corvallis, *the most severely rent burdened city in the entire state of Oregon* with 37.1% of households spending more than 50% of their income on rent.¹
- Over the past five years, our Coordinated Entry list for those seeking shelter has increased by 89%.
- Black, Indigenous and other people of color are over-represented among our unhoused population, and our organizations have brought on staff and built community partnerships to provide culturally appropriate support.

We need to invest in housing and services all across the state, so that **each community** can meet the needs of our unhoused neighbors in the place where they have family and other support networks. Uneven provision of services to vulnerable individuals and families forces them to travel to find means to address basic needs.

In Benton County, we have been investing in county, city and community-based organization capacity to address the housing

¹ 2022 Severe Rent Burden in Oregon (ACS 2020), link:

https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/UP/Documents/Annual_Severe_Rent_Burden_Announcement.pdf

emergency for the past several years, and are very grateful to be one of eight pilot sites to build long-term sustainable coordinated efforts to combat homelessness under HB 4123. As a founding member of our coordinated city-county homelessness response advisory board, I can attest to the value of building county-wide capacity across the housing continuum, with strategic investments to fill the housing, service and program gaps in the system. As a result of our coordination, local CBO Corvallis Housing First was funded for a Turnkey project and we have leveraged additional investments from our CCO and community action agency to increase shelter capacity, case management and care coordination.

Every county and its cities should have the opportunity to build locally tailored capacity to address homelessness and housing insecurity. The bottom-up, city-county approach builds **lasting capacity** to address homelessness on an ongoing basis, long after a state of emergency. We hope the Legislature will extend the HB 4123 pilot program across the balance of the state.

We hope to collaborate with our sister counties Linn and Lincoln, given that we share community members as well as critical partners, such as InterCommunity Health Network CCO and Community Services Consortium, our community action agency.

Thank you for recognizing the immensity of our housing crisis in HB 2001 and for providing several of the critical policy tools that are necessary to house those that are most vulnerable among us. We look forward to continuing to work with you as additional housing issues are addressed over the remainder of the 2023 Legislative Session.