

Submitter: Hailey Fox

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3970

Dear Members of the Committee,

There are both nonprofit and state-funded support systems in place to provide for the safety of homeless young adults. There are several ways, however, that these systems allow a significant number of individuals to fall through the cracks and remain unsafe/unhoused/on the streets. Minors, for example, are protected by the Child Welfare program, under the OR Department of Human Services. The challenge there is that the government system lacks sufficient, alternative, creative approaches to housing runaways, with significant trauma history, potential mental health diagnoses and/or substance use disorders. Those minors are unable or unwilling to reside in foster placements, their alternative being camping and/or spending time with unsafe adults. With their legal guardians' permission, however, they are supported by Homeless Youth Services, including the various day or residential shelters run by Looking Glass. Another example are the minors who are not U.S. citizens and may not have come the United States with their legal guardians. That makes it incredibly difficult for ODHS to file for custody and/or place them in a foster home. Therefore, they remain unhoused while immigrant rights organizations struggle through the plethora of bureaucratic processes needed to earn them refugee status or victims of human trafficking. For these and other reasons, the Looking Glass PEER Shelter, which provides shelter, meals, showers and case management to 24 youth at any given time, has been near or at capacity since opening in October 2023, sometimes in excess, with the use of two emergency beds. If the state systems in place were already sufficient in their operation and funding, this would not be the case. For these reasons, it is vital that the Oregon General Fund be utilized for shelter services and Behavioral Health Resource Network related work. Without those systems in place in Lane County, so many more young adults would be living on the streets, without supports in place to assist them in improving the quality of their own lives as well as those of their pets and children. It is vital that tax payers prioritize this demographic which represents the future of our community well-being and safety.