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MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

February 24, 2025

Chair Representative Annessa Hartman
Vice-Chair Representative Anna Scharf
Vice-Chair Representative Hoa Nguyen
Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

Subject: Letter of Support for House Bill 3079

Dear Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Scharf, Vice-Chair Nguyen, and Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services,

As Marion County Commissioner, I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 3079, which mandates the Department of Human Services to update its 2022 cost estimate for implementing programs aimed at addressing youth homelessness. This bill represents a critical step toward better understanding and effectively addressing the needs of Oregon's unsheltered youth population.

Oregon currently has one of the highest rates of unaccompanied, unsheltered youth in the nation, a statistic that demands urgent attention. According to the Oregon Department of Education, over 22,000 K-12 students experienced homelessness during the 2023-2024 school year, accounting for about 4% of the state's total K-12 population. Many of these youth are under the age of 18, and more than half of them did not attend school regularly, highlighting the profound impact of housing instability on their education and well-being. This number is likely an undercount, as many young people do not report their homelessness due to stigma, shame, or misunderstanding of their circumstances. The combination of rising living costs, the end of pandemic aid, and a lack of adequate resources has contributed to this increase, further exacerbating the already challenging situation for Oregon's most vulnerable youth. Addressing youth homelessness requires targeted solutions, with an emphasis on stable housing, education, and life skills support to create lasting change.

As someone who has lived through youth homelessness myself, I understand firsthand the unique vulnerabilities and barriers faced by these young people. This lived experience informs my belief that our current approaches need a fresh look and deeper investment. We must improve our understanding of the true scope and complexity of youth homelessness, which includes addressing the interrelated issues of trauma, housing instability, behavior health, poverty, and systemic inequities.

HB 3079 not only calls for updated cost estimates but also emphasizes the critical importance of planning for sustainable and strategic investments. Programs supporting youth experiencing

homelessness must be sufficiently funded, adequately staffed, and reflective of the lived realities of young people themselves. The Oregon Department of Human Services has previously indicated that current funding falls drastically short of need. An updated, accurate assessment of these costs will enable policymakers to more effectively allocate resources.

Additionally, local governments and communities are in the best position to understand the unique challenges they face and the most effective solutions to address them. By collaborating closely with local governments, service providers, and community organizations, we can ensure that funding is directed where it will have the greatest impact. Those working on the ground every day, housing providers, educators, and community leaders, have firsthand knowledge of the barriers youth face and the strategies that yield meaningful results. Investing in partnerships with local communities allows for more targeted, efficient, and sustainable solutions that reflect the real needs of the people they serve. House Bill 3079 presents an opportunity to align state resources with local expertise, fostering a more coordinated and responsive approach to tackling youth homelessness.

I offer my knowledge and personal insights to support the Department of Human Services and this legislature as you address this critical issue. I strongly urge the passage of HB 3079 to ensure a safer, more stable future for all of Oregon's youth.

Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Danielle Bethell".

Danielle Bethell

Chair