



12 February 2024

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon Legislature

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jimmy Jones, and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency in Salem. We serve low-income residents of Marion, Polk and nine other counties across Oregon. Annually we provide more than \$70 million in services and direct client assistance for housing, homelessness, energy and weatherization, and early learning programs to more than 60,000 Oregonians in poverty. I also serve as the Vice President for Legislative Affairs at the Community Action Partnership of Oregon, sit on the Housing Committee of the Racial Justice Council and the House Bill 2100 Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities, and Chair the Legislature's Joint Task Force on Hospital Discharge. I am also a Member of the Board at the Oregon Alliance for runaway and homeless youth. For many years, I have been an advocate for the homeless and housing unstable residents of our state.

On behalf of MWVCAA and the unsheltered community of Oregon, we write in support of the -3 Amendments to **Senate Bill 1530**, which will provide \$40 million in additional funds for the Oregon Diversion Assistance Program (ORE-DAP) and the state's Eviction Prevention Rapid Response (EPRR) program, with specific carve-outs for Oregon's endangered culturally specific communities. For the past two years, these programs have worked collectively to keep thousands of Oregonians in their homes, often under extraordinary conditions. My Agency alone has provided more than \$40 million in eviction prevention assistance to more than 6,000 Marion-Polk households since 2020.

Last year was a difficult time for people in poverty. Inflation remains high in our rental market, and unlike butter, eggs, and gasoline, rent increases are baked into the system and never decline with variable market forces. Last year we saw a 1/3rd reduction in SNAP benefits, the end of many pandemic-era programs that provided additional social service funding at a scale not seen since the 1960s, and an allowable 15 percent rent increase in 2023. In April, predictably, we learned that Oregon's homeless population grew 22.5 percent between 2020 and 2022, compared to the national average of just 0.3 percent for that same period, a rate of growth more than double the increases in Washington and tripling the increase in California. Just a few weeks ago we learned that Oregon's homeless population increased another 12 percent in 2023, on top of the enormous growth of 2020-2022. These increases are not an accident. They are not the result of drugs, nor inadequate treatment and mental health services. They are simply, and irrevocably, a consequence of unreachable housing costs, a correlation which has been demonstrated, again and again, in national research.

Today we have an opportunity to keep tomorrow's homeless numbers from swamping our response systems two years from now. The Governor's bold and ambitious housing production plans will take years to be brought on line. In the meantime, we have an opportunity in SB 1530 to hold back the tide, to shelter people living outside, but also to interdict that housing-to-homeless pipeline that is creating such enormous downstream costs today. We urge you to protect our vulnerable populations, the elderly living in trailer parks, children who will have

nowhere else to go, the disabled who are on fixed incomes, and thousands more across our state who cannot remain housed without the financial supports included in SB 1530.

We urge the Committee to support SB 1530 and work toward its swift passage. The well-being and future of our fellow Oregonians depend on it. Thank you for your attention to these critical issues facing our communities, and for your dedication to making Oregon a place where everyone has a safe and affordable place to call home.

Respectfully,

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

Jimmy Jones
Executive Director