



February 9, 2022

House Committee on Housing
Oregon Legislature
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Morgan and Campos, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jimmy Jones and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency here in Salem, where we serve people in poverty in Marion and Polk Counties, as well as nine other Oregon counties in some programs. Across the Agency we serve more than 50,000 low-income Oregonians each year. I am also the Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon, which for nearly 40 years has been Oregon's delivery system for homeless, housing, energy, weatherization and other anti-poverty programs. Our agency operates the ARCHES Project here in Salem, which is one of the most well-known and innovative homeless service models in Oregon, and includes our Project Turnkey Motel, the ARCHES Inn.

I write today in support of House Bill 4123, which establishes pilot projects in eight largely rural communities in Oregon. This pilot creates locally-led, regional housing coordination that combines nationally recognized best practices with local, on the ground expertise. It blends a research-based approach with the spirit of collaboration and innovation that defines our small communities in Oregon. If we have learned one thing through the pandemic, we have learned that local communities are *the experts* on how to best serve their neighbors. Too often, however, there is little to fund homeless capacity and infrastructure outside our major cities. Inter-agency, inter-governmental cooperation is often a heavy lift and expensive proposition for rural Oregon communities. This measure addresses that critical shortcoming, and funds the development of vital infrastructure that will improve access to services for rural Oregonians struggling with housing instability and homelessness.

Modern homelessness dates back to the 1980s, and a series of public policy choices that set the country in motion on this slow-motion, gathering crisis, one now nearly a half-century in the making. Nationally, we have seen the consequences of poor public policy choices in our largest cities. Today, across Oregon, throughout the metro and the Willamette Valley especially, the sheer scale of the homeless crisis has overwhelmed our capacity to turn that tide. So too will be the fate of rural Oregon in time. Without a critical intervention now, the current wave of unsheltered homelessness will overwhelm smaller towns, as it has Portland, Salem, and Eugene. These pilot projects will create a systematic and practical approach. They will give us a fighting chance to stem what will be, in time, a crushing tide of rural homelessness in Oregon. It will allow rural communities to develop local solutions that meet the needs of their individual communities, instead of expecting that one-size-fits-all approaches—that have generally been developed for our largest cities—to work in small towns across Oregon.

I urge your support for this innovative measure. Help level the playing field for our rural communities; who have been left to fight a growing tide of homelessness largely on their own, without the resources enjoyed by our larger cities. Ten years ago such an ask would have been unnecessary. Today it's vitally important. Because ten years from now, what we see in the Willamette Valley and Portland will likely spread far beyond our cities, and touch lives in every small town in Oregon.

Respectfully,


Jimmy Jones
Executive Director