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To: House Committee on Housing
From: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center
Date: February 9th, 2022
Re: HB 4123-1

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Campos and Morgan, and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I am pleased to submit this written testimony in support of HB 4123. This bill will support the efforts of local and regional governments and partners in achieving a coordinated community response to the prevention of homelessness. We thank Representative Kropf for his leadership in bringing this bill forward.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Helping families maintain safe, stable housing is a critical part of our work. Housing is about much more than a roof over one's head; it is about opportunity, stability, and health. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible for families to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy.

The majority of our client community is rent burdened – one emergency away from homelessness – or are houseless themselves, living either doubled-up or in shelter, or living outside without adequate shelter. The experience of homelessness has well-documented long-term consequences on health and well-being. Rates of homelessness pose great challenges for Oregon, and these challenges appear poised to grow, as state rents are rising, vacancies are low, and communities across the state struggle to respond with compassion and efficacy to some of the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness in the nation.

HB 4123 will provide grants to facilitate coordinated strategic planning to address funding needs and goals for increasing and streamlining resources for people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, incorporating national best practices, and creating pathways to permanent and supportive housing. Many regional jurisdictions and stakeholders have wished for the opportunity to collaborate towards solutions addressing homelessness, but have lacked the funding to support this planning, or the structure within which to engage in these discussions. HB 4123 will provide important opportunities for 8 regional communities across the state.

HB 4213 includes several important elements that will be key to successful coordination efforts:

- The bill sets a clear goal of eliminating racial disparities within homeless services. It is well-documented that our state's housing laws and zoning laws have contributed to systemic and structural racism present in all of our communities. People of color are at disproportionate risk of homelessness and at risk of disparities in access to services. Including this goal in the structure of the bill is important for its success.

- The bill prioritizes incorporating the voices of people with lived experience in the planning efforts. The voices and perspectives of people who have experiencing homelessness, and of advocates who serve communities experiencing or at risk of homelessness, will bring invaluable input to the planning process.
- The bill sets a model for broad coordination across agencies and systems, ensuring that law enforcement and criminal justice, legal aid, DHS, OHCS, social service organizations, community-based housing providers, and people with lived experience are all invited to the table.

Passage of HB 4123 will bring people and systems together to help to mitigate the struggles for the many Oregonians who have no other option but to sleep and try to survive living outside. On behalf of our clients experiencing and at risk of homelessness across the state, we thank you for your attention to this bill and urge your support.

Thank you for your work and for your commitment to Oregonians.