



**OREGON HOUSING *and*
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

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April 16th, 2025

Representative Pam Marsh, Chair
Representative Tom Andersen, Vice-Chair
Representative Vikki Breese-Iverson, Vice-Chair

House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in support of SB 814 – Eligibility Criteria for Oregon Rental Assistance for Youth (RAY) Program for Certain Justice-Involved Youth At Risk of Becoming Homeless

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair Andersen, Vice-Chair Breese-Iverson, Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Casey Houlihan, and I am a Legislative and Government Relations Coordinator for Oregon Housing and Community Service (OHCS). I support the work of our Housing Stabilization Division, within which lives the program relevant to this bill. I am here today to voice our support for SB 814, which is a technical fix to address a gap in eligibility criteria for justice-involved youth in the Oregon Rental Assistance for Youth (RAY) Program.

I want to start by providing some additional context about this program. The RAY program is a pilot program that is intended to provide stable housing for homeless and/or justice-involved youth. This program was intended primarily to be a stopgap measure for high-risk youth and young adults with an urgent need for stable housing that they can utilize while getting connected to additional services and, when appropriate, applying/waiting for placement in longer-term rental assistance programs (federal housing vouchers, etc). This process can often take months or even years to complete – and it requires stable housing throughout.

The OHCS program manual for RAY states that participants must be below 50% AMI, and that they are eligible to receive rental assistance until they turn 25 years old. It is not currently a statewide program. There are three regions where the program operates, and it is administered by three local agencies for their respective regions: Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency (MWVCAA), Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, and Washington County.



This program began in 2022 with \$2.3M in one-time funding, and currently there is no ongoing funding for this program once this one-time allotment has been exhausted. Due to difficulties connecting with existing systems without an established framework and challenges connecting with target populations, resulting delays limited our ability to get funds to grantees for this use within our original target timeframe. As such, a portion of those funds were carried over - and the program timeline was extended through 2027.

To the bill: Currently, in the statutes governing the operation of this program, there is an error in the statutory reference to programs like those operated by the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) that make it unclear whether OYA program participants would be eligible for housing supports. The eligibility criteria many folks use to qualify for support through the RAY program is being homeless. This bill seeks to clarify that youth transitioning out of programs like OYA can be eligible to receive housing benefits through the RAY program, rather than requiring that individuals must first become homeless in order to meet the necessary eligibility criteria. This is a very narrow, very specific, carefully crafted clarification of the eligibility criteria, and it is not expected to result in a large influx of new applicants seeking housing benefits.

Thank you for your consideration and I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Respectfully,

Casey Houlihan
Legislative and Government Relations Coordinator
Oregon Housing and Community Services

