

Department of County Human Services

March 29, 2023

Senator Kayse Jama, Chair
Senate Committee on Housing and Development
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 918

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of Multnomah County, which acts as the community action organization for our geography, I am writing in support of SB 918 and the -2 amendment. This legislation provides critical resources to address homelessness in our communities, building upon existing proven homeless service programs and creating a dedicated stream of funding for culturally specific and responsive organizations.

SB 918 increases funding for the Emergency Housing Account (EHA) and the State Homeless Assistance Program (SHAP) by an additional \$9.5 million over the current service level. These grants are the primary capacity and sheltering grants used across Oregon by our local community based organizations. Typically, as in Multnomah County, these programs are implemented in partnership with other local nonprofit community service providers. These grants are critical to the state-wide Community Action network and to ensuring geographic equity across the state.

EHA and SHAP program funds have not increased since the pandemic began, and currently the Community Action network in 2023 is operating on a 2019 level of funding while facing increased costs and an exponentially higher need as pandemic funding and protections expire. Without an increase this session, that 2019 level of funding will remain static until 2025. EHA and SHAP are vital funding streams for all of Oregon - urban and rural, and are distributed in a way that ensures geographic equity. EHA in particular is the single most valuable state homeless grant. Its flexible use supports other grant work like HUD grants, which require a 25 percent match. In Multnomah County, these dollars will also leverage millions in local funding for the community's homeless response.

The bill also establishes the Oregon Housing Justice Program and provides approximately \$26 million in funding to continue and make ongoing support for culturally specific wraparound services to promote equity and address key gaps in access to homelessness services statewide. These populations include:

- Culturally specific and responsive organizations - to support activities such as street outreach, shelter services and homelessness prevention to reduce racial disparities.
- Oregon Worker Relief - to provide housing stability support to immigrant Oregonians who have been excluded from traditional statewide investments
- The Urban League of Portland, Inc - to continue a network of culturally specific organizations statewide to provide assistance and services to households who are at risk of housing instability, with a focus on BIPOC households

- The Immigrant and Refugee Community organization - to support housing stability for immigrant and refugee populations

The Oregon Housing Justice Program is an investment in alignment with HB 2100 and the OHCS Task Force on Racial Disparities - and represents vital and continued investments in the coming biennium towards the task force's goals and recommendations.

We at Multnomah County support SB918 and the -2 amendment to reduce racial disparities and strengthen critical resources to organizations that have deep roots in their communities and have developed expertise in addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by different cultural groups and in different communities throughout the state.

Thank you,

Mohammad Bader
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Multnomah County

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