

Chair Hartman, Vice Chair Nguyen, Vice Chair Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your constant commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. While I was director of the former McMinnville Community Low-Barrier Shelter, we served unsheltered youth directly, in and among a broad population of McMinnville's unsheltered and unhoused folk. I write today in support of HB 3079 because we must provide and ensure the fullest possible range of services for Oregon's unaccompanied houseless youth: those who are not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians, and who are homeless.

I hope the committee --- and in due course the full State Legislature --- will affirm housing as a basic human right for all Oregonians, especially our youth. Oregon has the fourth-highest number of houseless youths in the nation. HB 3079 would fund support for homeless youth services across Oregon through the Youth Experiencing Homelessness Program, a model with a strong national reputation, for which Oregon is considered a leader in this field of service. YEHP provides youth with long-term housing support along with a stable home, mentorship, and support system while they attend school. HB 3079 also provides financing to expand or enhance existing shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, mental health/substance use services, and other transitional housing options for houseless youth. It will also dedicate funds to prevent evictions for school-aged youth and families or rapidly rehouse them if they do become houseless.

Over years of sheltering we saw the population of unsheltered, unhoused youth grow to roughly twice the scale of need when I first took charge of MCLBS. We saw the raw, real consequences of unsheltered youth who suffered a catastrophic lack of family and supportive structures as well. We worked to protect youth from sexual violence and supported them when that horror found them. We tended to youth Narcaned back to life after fentanyl overdoses. We listened to houseless wanderers barely older than children as they described abuse, abandonment, and dislocation, with too few supportive options available to them. We hoped all the while more would be done, by those with the power to do it, on these kids' behalf.

In the United States, half of unhoused adults were first unhoused in their youth. We know that by investing in services for this population that we can and will deter lifetimes of housing instability and homelessness. Every child and young adult deserves access to safe and stable supports that help them thrive, especially a safe and stable home. HB 3079 will help make that a reality for our homeless youth here in Oregon.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,

Geoffrey Clayton
Former Director
McMinnville Community Low-Barrier Shelter