

Submitter: Joshua Stromberg-Wojcik
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3970

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chair Drazan, Vice-Chair Pham, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. My name is Joshua Stromberg-Wojcik and I am writing on behalf of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon in support of HB 3079 and ensuring a full continuum of services for Oregon's unaccompanied houseless youth and families.

I hope you will join me in affirming housing as a basic human right for all Oregonians. HB 3079 provides funding for homeless youth services in rural Oregon through the Youth Emergency Housing Program. This Program provides flexible funding to help prevent family homelessness through things like rent assistance, transportation and legal services. HB 3970 also provides funding to expand or enhance existing shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, behavioral health and substance use services for houseless youth.

Youth houselessness disproportionately affects the LGBTQIA2S+ community. Studies indicate that LGBTQ+ youth, who make up a small percentage of the overall youth population (around 7%), account for a much larger portion (up to 40%) of homeless youth (Lesley University, "The Cost of Coming Out"). Tragically many LGBTQIA2S+ youth are kicked out of their homes by their own parents for being gay. This is a triple whammy as they not only suffer feelings of rejection and worthlessness thanks to their parents' actions, and not only does society reinforces those messages by holding up straightness and cis-gender-ness as the norm and standard to which they don't live up, they now also have to figure out housing and basic services on the streets, on their own. In fact, in the rural areas that this bill supports, there tend to be even stronger anti-gay feelings in the community, further marginalizing homeless youth. This is where this bill comes in and is essential. All youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas, deserve housing as a basic human right. This bill not only provides housing, it addresses the roots of homelessness for youth through behavioral health and substance use services for those youth.

In the United States, half of homeless adults first experienced homelessness 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 to have access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive. HB 3970 ensures that is a reality for our young Oregonians experiencing

homelessness.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Josh Stromberg-Wojcik