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To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development
From: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center
Date: February 13th, 2024
Re: Support for SB 1530 Shelter Investments

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

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 1530, and its proposed investment of \$65 million in Oregon's network of shelters and transitional housing services.

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. 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.

Homelessness and housing instability are the most devastating issues facing our client communities across the state. At the time of the 2023 Point-in-Time Count, more than 20,000 Oregonians were experiencing homelessness across the state – more than 13,000 of whom were without shelter. Nearly 23,000 Oregon students experienced homelessness during the last school year, according to the Oregon Department of Education. It is well-recognized that these numbers are vast undercounts, due to the varying definitions of homelessness used, funding, methodology, and the often-invisible nature of homelessness. Despite these numbers, in January of 2023, there were only 8,705 shelter beds available in the state. In order to shelter everyone in need, we would have to add more than 11,000 beds to the supply.

While the Oregon Law Center supports the development of affordable housing infrastructure as the long-term solution to homelessness, and the investment in eviction prevention and rent assistance services to prevent increased homelessness, we recognize the immediate need for investments to ensure access to shelter and transitional housing for our neighbors who currently have no other option but to live outside.

With only one year-round emergency shelter bed for every three individuals experiencing homelessness in Oregon, the need for stable, ongoing funding cannot be overstated. During the COVID pandemic, Oregon began making one-time investments to expand shelters across the state. While Oregon has recently added more shelter capacity, 47% of the shelters that existed before these investments indicated to OHCS they are now at risk of closing. Oregon cannot afford to lose any more shelter beds. Oregon must see those investments through to maintain the shelter beds that local communities have created and need.



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Ensuring that shelters stay open is an issue of racial equity. Black Oregonians experience homelessness at rates 3.27 times their share of the total state population, while Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Oregonians experienced homelessness at a rate 3.58 times their overall share of the state population, and Oregonians who are American Indian or Alaskan Native experience of homelessness at rates more than 2.43 times their share of the total state population.

Ensuring shelters remain open is also an issue of geographic equity. Of the shelters at risk of closure due to operational funding needs, a disproportionate number were located in the Balance of State Continuum of Care.

In closing, thank you to Governor Kotek and this committee for the focus on immediate, interim, and long-term solutions to the immense crisis we are in. Strengthening our shelter system is a critical strategy that will keep people alive as we build enough affordable homes to meet the demand in the state. Until we have enough affordable housing for all, shelters are needed to respond to the humanitarian crisis on our streets. For these reasons, we urge support for this \$65 million investment.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Oregonians.