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February 8, 2022

House Committee on Housing
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for House Bill 4123, A Coordinated Homeless Response System

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Campos and Morgan, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 4123. For 36 years, Central Oregon LandWatch(COLW) has been working to create well-planned cities and protect wild, open spaces across the region. Leveraging our legal expertise, policy analysis, and experience with Oregon's land-use planning system, we work to guide development where it makes the most sense and protects the land and water that sustains our communities and ecosystems. For COLW, complete communities mean access to housing for all, and we therefore strongly support HB 4123.

We face a humanitarian crisis with the increased number of unhoused neighbors in our community; Deschutes County and the cities of Bend, Redmond, Sisters and La Pine have responded to this crisis, with initiatives such as the City of Bend & Deschutes County Emergency Homelessness Task Force. While these steps are underway, they need the support of HB 4123 to grow their reach—the causes of houselessness, and the needs of those experiencing it or on the verge of it, are multifaceted and complex and require a high level of coordination and resources. HB 4123 provides funding and requires the coordination necessary to expand on and streamline both reactive and proactive homelessness services.

As the bill indicates, it is critical to allocate resources across the county and across the varying sets of needs. The funding proposed by House Bill 4123 would create a centralized response office that not only assess the current need, but also coordinates across local operations and with local advocates to make efficient use of funds, to help those directly impacted by homelessness, and to create systems and provide services for those at risk or on the brink of homelessness.

The need for a funded Coordinated Homeless Response System could not be clearer; in reports posted by the City of Bend, anywhere from 500-1,000 people in Central Oregon are without shelter on any current given night. These numbers include 360 households with children and 423 students K-12.¹ These numbers represent a 40% increase from 2018, and the City acknowledges this vastly undercounts the actual number of Central Oregon residents

¹ <https://www.bendoregon.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/47877/637389763725730000>



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experiencing houselessness at any given time.² For those unhoused, the available temporary and permanent housing units and facilities in Bend meets less than 50% of the need.³ Indeed, a City of Bend property purchased under Project Turnkey as a permanent shelter will be converted into emergency housing by the end of this month, postponing intended renovations to meet the immediate, emergency housing demand of houseless folks.⁴ Additionally, in December 2020, Bend's median house price hit almost \$700,000, and over half of the Deschutes County renters are rent burdened with more than 30% of their income going to rent and utilities.⁵ These statistics are just a few of the factors that have converged and worsened during the pandemic to exacerbate those experiencing houselessness.

As such, the need for HB 4123 is evident—this bill will efficiently institutionalize a coordinated proactive and reactive response to the humanitarian crisis of houselessness in our community, and COLW therefore urges the State Legislature to pass HB 4123, for Deschutes County and the seven other counties slated for funding who face this crisis.

Respectfully,

Kristen Sabo

Kristen Sabo
Staff Attorney
Central Oregon LandWatch

² <https://centraloregondaily.com/central-oregon-point-in-time-homeless-count-shows-40-jump-from-2018/>

³ <https://councilgoals2123-bendoregon.hub.arcgis.com/pages/housing>

⁴ https://www.bendbulletin.com/homeless/homeless-shelter-on-division-street-to-open-at-end-of-february/article_ed10c94a-8534-11ec-9295-fb219de792b6.html

⁵ <https://www.houselessindeschutes.org>



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