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Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Campos & Morgan, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Britt Conroy, and I am Public Policy Director at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. EMO is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, organizations and interfaith partners. We work to improve the lives of Oregonians through housing and other direct service programs, dialogue and advocacy.

EMO strongly supports HB 2578, which reforms the mortgage interest deduction and offers a stark choice -- one that EMO sees in clear moral terms: Affordable home ownership and providing housing to children with families and youth who are experiencing homelessness are more important than this tax break.

And the number of Oregonians experiencing houselessness are staggering, perhaps no more so than the number of our children who are homeless. Based on the most recent full-year data from the Oregon Department of Education, more than 21,000 students experienced homelessness during the 2018-2019 school year, impacting families in every corner of the state.

In Lincoln County, where EMO operates a program placing unaccompanied homeless youth with volunteer home providers, one in six students experienced homelessness during the 2018-2019 school year. Parts of Lane County have rates as high as nearly one in three students experiencing homelessness.ⁱ

A survey conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors stated that “the most frequently cited reasons for family homelessness are a lack of affordable housing, poverty, and domestic violence.”ⁱⁱ

We see the link between domestic violence, homelessness and, importantly, skewed state housing funding priorities play out right here in Oregon. In 2017, according to Governor Brown’s Housing Agenda, 8323 requests for emergency shelter could not be met because Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault shelters were full. A chilling 8300 times. That means that on average, we turned our back on 23 survivors and their children day in and day out in this state.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness and research published in the journal, “Pediatrics,” children who are homeless are more likely to have moderate to severe acute and chronic health problems.^{iv}

The Child Trends Database, citing research from the National Center on Family Homelessness, notes that:

“Children without stable homes are more than twice as likely as others to repeat a school grade, be expelled or suspended, or drop out of high school. A quarter or more of homeless children have witnessed violence, and more than half have problems with anxiety and depression.”^v

Nationally^{vi}:

- Latinx youth have a 33% higher risk of reporting homelessness.
- Black youth have an 83% higher risk of reporting homelessness.
- LBGTQIA+ youth have a 120% higher risk of reporting homelessness.
- Youth reporting a household annual income of less than \$24,000 have a 162% higher risk of reporting homelessness.

Finally, I would like to close with a quote from an article about homelessness in our region that appeared in three newspapers across Oregon this week. A national housing expert said the following:

“There is no lack of housing when it comes to people at the top of the economic ladder.”^{vii}

HB 2578 would enable Oregon to stand with these youth, with families at risk of houselessness and with BIPOC community members who seek to become homeowners.

Thank you for your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Britt Conroy
Public Policy Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

ⁱ Oregon Department of Education, Homeless Student Data: Homeless Student Percentages by District. Available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/ESEA/McKinney-Vento/Documents/Homeless%20Student%20Percent%20by%20District%2017-18%20for%20web.xlsx>.

ⁱⁱ United States Conference of Mayors. (2009). Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A status report on hunger and homelessness in America's cities. Available at: <http://usmayors.org/HHSurvey2007/hhsurvey07.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ “Housing Policy Agenda.” August 30, 2018. Available at <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/policy/documents/housing%20agenda%20final.pdf>

^{iv} Referenced at Child Trends Databank. (2015). *Homeless children and youth*. Available at: <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/homeless-children-and-youth>. Research from Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., Rinaldi, M., Masten, A. S., and Oberg, C. N. (2010). Asthma and behavior in homeless 4- to 7-year-olds. *Pediatrics*, 125, 145-151.

^v Child Trends Databank. (2015). *Homeless children and youth*. Available at: <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/homeless-children-and-youth>

^{vi} “Voices of Youth Count”, University of Chicago. November 2017. Available at <http://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/national-estimates-of-youth-homelessness/>

^{vii} “Did James Fuller Plymell III need to die?” Leah Sottile, *High Country News*, published in *The Oregonian*, March 9, 2021. See the article online at <https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2021/03/did-james-fuller-plymell-iii-need-to-die.html>.