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To: Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Capital Construction

Re: Multnomah County Behavioral Health Resource Center

Co-Chair Holvey and Girod Members of the Capital Construction Sub-Committee,

For the record, I am Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury. I am here to ask for Lottery Bonding proceeds to help Multnomah County complete construction of our Downtown Behavioral Health Resource Center.

The strong partnership between the state and Multnomah county has produced major accomplishments in recent years that improve the lives of our community members. Now we have an opportunity to further a shared, and urgent, priority.

Like many of the communities you represent, Multnomah County is facing a shortage of behavioral health resources required to sufficiently, effectively and equitably meet the demand for services. Decades of federal underinvestment in community-based mental health services have left all of us without the ability to adequately support people living with unmet mental health needs. And as you're all too familiar, the statewide affordable housing crisis has only exacerbated the problem.

I'm here today because we have a unique opportunity to respond.

Multnomah County has been working with a diverse set of stakeholders to create a behavioral health resource center that we believe will make a dramatic impact in the lives of the most vulnerable people in our community.

The center, located in downtown Portland, will provide a day space for over 100 homeless individuals living with untreated or under-treated behavioral health challenges, who simply need a safe place inside. There, individuals will be able to access peer-delivered services, build trust-based relationships that will lead to developing problem-solving skills, and getting support to plan and navigate the Behavioral Health System and other systems, such as housing and employment services. .

They'll also be able to access services that many of us take for granted: mail services, laundry facilities, and other essential daily living needs.

The Behavioral Health Resource Center will also provide a low barrier shelter space for more than 40 people who are homeless and experiencing chronic behavioral health issues and challenges.

Finally, the Center will have a number of short term bridge housing units to help individuals move from the instability and danger of surviving outside on the streets to safer, more permanent stable housing, within 90 days of enrollment into the program. People will have an opportunity to access life skill services, connect to treatment, and engage with peers who model a healthy recovery lifestyle.

And while the current project is designed to address the unique needs of people in Multnomah County, it is a “first-of-its-kind” project, and we believe the model could also be replicated in other parts of the state.

I want to close by saying that one thing I hear regularly from our community members is that it is critical to have a variety of options available. Some people just need time off the streets to find calm and rest. Others need a place to go when they’re ready to engage in services. And some need bridge housing as they prepare for a more permanent home.

That’s why I’m in full support of the current proposals to expand homeless shelters, navigation centers, and secure residential treatment facilities across our state. And that’s also why I believe our downtown Behavioral Health Resource Center is a vital part of the statewide response.

There is no “one size fits all” solution. The reach and complexity of this challenge demand that we deepen our partnership, and work towards a common goal of helping our neighbors experiencing challenges outside, on the streets and in the public eye, get safely inside, and into treatment and housing. With your support, together, we can do that.

No single building or program, and no one government, will solve this. Across our state, some of the most impactful and effective solutions are the result of collaborations and partnerships, and I hope that sort of coordination will continue with this project.

Twelve point five million dollars will allow us to finish renovating 333 SW Park in downtown Portland and continue helping our most vulnerable neighbors.

Thank you for your time.

Deborah Kafoury  
Chair, Multnomah County Board of Commissioners