



Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

April 15, 2021

Dear Chair Jama, Vice Chair Linthicum & committee members,

My name is Gwenn Wysling. I am the Executive Director of Bethlehem Inn. We operate the largest homeless shelter serving men, women and children for our region. Currently we do this in only one location in Bend, Oregon.

We appreciate the bi-partisan team that has brought this bill forward and look to the Senate's leadership to help see this bill through. I, along with so many of the partner agencies we work with, ask that the Oregon State Senate act to make sure that HB2006A is passed so that needed shelters and safety nets can work to provide the necessary resources for those in transition and experiencing homelessness.

HB 2006A requires *Qualified Entities* to carry out the goals of this bill. Qualified entities are the leaders that understand the need while having the ability and capacity to carry out the much needed shelter services as we respond to the challenges that COVID-19 and WildFires have thrust upon our state and vulnerable populations in our midst.

We have a responsibility to show up and address this priority with proven models. Timing is of the essence in preparing to move forward with organizations that are able to create the needed safety net to prevent chronic homelessness from taking hold and having a further detrimental impact on individuals and families *as well as* further straining our communities. This can be addressed through public/private partnerships that are already working in concert to address this problem.

Bethlehem Inn is ready to expand our operations to open a shelter in a neighboring community that currently has **NO** shelter beds. We have received conditional use approval and currently approved again at the appeal level from one individual, absentee business owner that does not even reside in Oregon. If this individual elects to continue this opposition through the systems in place, it would go to Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA). While our case is strong, the current siting system and this potential delay tactic could end up taking years to ultimately approve. Meanwhile, this would essentially deprive Redmond the ability to seize this investment opportunity to build this much needed resource for our Region. The flexibility within HB2006A provides the needed sideboards. Timing is of the essence for those of us willing to step up through Project Turnkey to provide a much needed solution.

Representative Jack Zika, and a member on the HB Committee who helped author this bill spoke up in support about this important need and the particular example of Bethlehem Inn challenged in establishing a shelter in Redmond, Oregon; and there are many other similar situations that have invested professional services and community support that need HB2006A in order to proceed. HB2006A can help make viable resources work for Oregon and all Oregonians.

Our local Homeless Leadership Coalition spends literally an entire year trying to find a location that can be used as a warming shelter for the region. The warming shelter closed for the season at the end March yet the overnight lows are still in the low 20's. HB2006A would be another tool to assist in alleviating the wasted time and resources that could better be spent helping to provide a stronger safety nets in our communities. HB2006A needs your advocacy and action before the problem gets even worse. Lives are depending on this.

Sincerely,

Gwenn Wysling
Executive Director



P.O. Box 8540 • Bend, OR 97708 • ph 541.322.8768 • fax 541.318.7336 • bethleheminn.org

