

MAXINE E. DEXTER, MD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISTRICT 33



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

To: Members of the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness

Date: March 30, 2023

Subject: Support HB 2879

Vice Chairs Helfrich and Gamba and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Dr. Maxine Dexter and I am honored to be the State Representative for House District 33, which includes NW & Downtown Portland, Linnton, and Cathedral Park. I am grateful for this opportunity today to present to you HB 2879, providing grants for nonprofit providers of affordable housing to serve low-income, housing-insecure college students.

A 2019 study by Portland State University found that 45% of their students had experienced housing instability over the past year, with 16% reporting homelessness, and BIPOC students are disproportionately represented in these numbers. College students struggle to access affordable and safe housing for a variety of reasons, including rental requirements that they are unable to meet from a lack of family support, difficulty making rent from the burden of working in addition to completing their schoolwork, and overburdened housing markets that have limited options for students with families or other needs.

This has lasting impacts on the feasibility of pursuing higher education for students who come from marginalized or underprivileged backgrounds, furthering racial divides in education access. As someone who was the first in my family to ever graduate from college and who had to work more than full time while a student to be able to afford housing and the cost of school, I understand very personally the importance of affordable housing for college students. The cost of housing has a significant impact on students attending schools throughout the state, who are unable to focus their efforts on their academic pursuits because of housing instability or the excess burdens of working long hours to make ends meet. Lack of affordable housing also prevents students from attending these institutions in the first place as it is challenging to even consider going to school when affordable housing, public transportation and/or affordable childcare is difficult to locate in the area.

PSU will be conducting a study in the 2023-24 year about appropriate action to take to remedy the challenges faced by college students in accessing safe and affordable housing and opening opportunities for unprivileged students to follow their academic aspirations. In the interim, we have identified important work being performed by nonprofits such as College Housing

Northwest, in assisting low-income students in remaining stably housed and able to continue making progress on their degrees.

HB 2879 will provide \$5,000,000 in funding for these organizations through Oregon Department of Human Services' self-sufficiency programs. College Housing Northwest [previously received \\$500,000 in 2022 as part of their Affordable Rents for College Students program](#), which allocated housing subsidies to 25 low-income college students who were experiencing homelessness, providing one-year in rent for them and allowing them the opportunity to continue pursuing their educational goals.

Given the housing crisis that our state is currently experiencing, it is essential that we take steps to protect our vulnerable students and support them in finishing the educational programs that they are pursuing. Access to basic food and shelter is fundamental to any person's ability to be successful in their lives. A person cannot possibly be a high-achieving student when they are food or housing insecure. This money will be allocated to student community members most in need of these investments through the nonprofit funding.

I urge you to support this bill as a means to do all we can to be sure vulnerable students in our community have housing security while long-term solutions are being developed through further evaluation and study. Students, especially those without significant parental or generational support, are at significant risk for experiencing homelessness and/or being forced to drop out of college. At this time when the need for workforce development and educational opportunities are more pronounced than ever, it is unacceptable for us to accept maintaining the status quo for our housing insecure students.

Thank you for your time and consideration today, and I urge your support for HB 2879.

Sincerely,



Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D.
House District 33 (NW Portland and NE Washington County)