



**OREGON HOUSING and
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

725 SUMMER STREET NE, SUITE B | SALEM, OR 97301
503-986-2000 | www.oregon.gov/OHCS

March 2, 2021

Chair Julie Fahey
House Committee on Housing
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 2001 -1 and Modernizing Oregon's Homeless System

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Morgan, Vice-Chair Campos, and Members of the Committee:

OHCS brings forward House Bill 2100 to modernize Oregon's homeless system, ensure equitable services for all, focus on outcomes for Oregonians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and bring more seats to the table. This legislation opens the door to a new system that is inclusive and aligns with Oregon's Statewide Housing Plan. With this legislation, you have the opportunity to set a vision and a strategy to end homelessness, and to build a statute that recognizes and names the crisis of homelessness and strategies to address it. We urge your support.

Over the summer, OHCS heard a call from Reimagine Oregon and other organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and other people of color to change the way we do business to create more equitable outcomes. During the August Special Session, OHCS sought to broaden the providers we work with to ensure culturally specific and culturally responsive organizations had a seat at the table and the ability to partner with the state. As a result of our advocacy, for the first time, OHCS established a collaborative application process for federal Emergency Solution Grants. More than fifty-seven Oregon based organizations, from communities large and small, applied to work directly with OHCS to provide shelter and homeless assistance in their local areas. HB 2100 creates a pathway for those organizations and others to continue to partner with OHCS in homelessness solutions.

We are in the midst of a humanitarian crisis. Despite increased investments and attention, the prevalence of homelessness is increasing. Each day, thousands of Oregonians go to sleep without shelter. The number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness almost doubled from 2015 to 2019¹. At the same time, as detailed below, Oregon has more than doubled investments in the Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA) program and the State Homelessness Assistance Program (SHAP). To be clear, the increase in people experiencing homelessness is not the fault of one agency, organization, or network. However, we must recognize that we as a

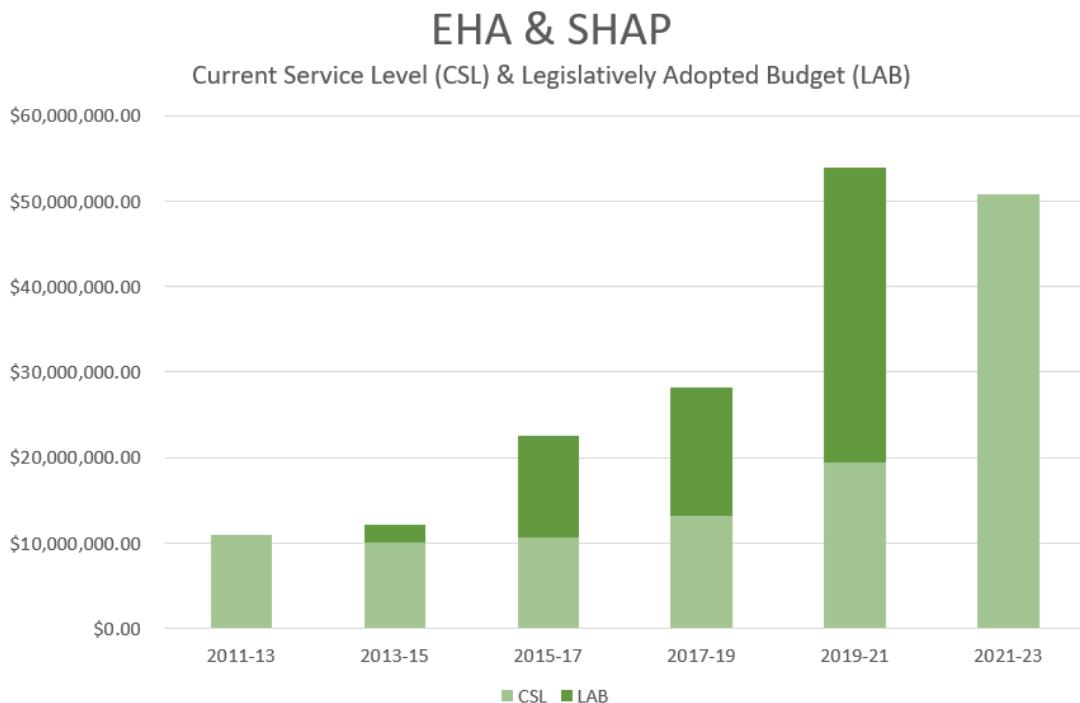
¹ [2019 Point in Time Count Data](#)



statewide system have failed to think strategically about the use of resources and to act boldly. Oregon's approach, with a closed system that only engages one network in this work, is unique. Many other states, including but not limited to Washington and Minnesota – which have similar urban and rural needs and demographics - have recognized the need to modernize their statutes and move toward collaborative applications and outcomes-oriented approaches in this work.

OHCS' Statewide Housing Plan, built with input from hundreds of providers and families with lived experience of poverty and homelessness, and informed by research and case studies of successful best practices inside and outside of our state, calls on us to take action. Our shared goal is to build a coordinated and concerted campaign to prevent and end homelessness, in particular the unsheltered homelessness of Oregon's veterans and Oregon's families with children. We cannot accomplish that goal with a statutory framework that is silent on homelessness, silent on racial equity, silent on best practices, silent on outcomes, and locks out Oregon's experienced and diverse array of service providers from offering input to OHCS and accessing public dollars.

The below graph illustrates the dramatic increase in funding for the Emergency Housing Account (EHA) and State Homeless Assistance Program (SHAP) over the last five biennia. We thank the legislature for committing to an increased Current Service Level (CSL) for these key programs and recognizing the need for this continued funding. The funding is now stabilized as part of CSL, and now is the time to ensure that the statutory direction is in place to ensure the highest and best use of these investments. HB 2100 will help Oregon make progress on that effort.



HB 2100 provides that 20% of 2021-23 CSL investments and any homeless services investments above that amount would be available using a collaborative application led by a local service provider. Oregon’s Housing Stability Council would determine the general use of these resources to make an impact on emergent needs and dedicated efforts such as addressing unsheltered family and youth homelessness or addressing disparities in homelessness. OHCS would work with new and existing grantees to fund local initiatives rooted in equity and explicitly designed to create the best outcomes for those we serve. To be clear, this funding would be made available to providers within the same regions that currently receive allocations of funding. **No community would lose funds due to HB 2100.** Community Action Agencies (CAAs) would directly and non-competitively receive the other 80% of EHA/SHAP, which equates to roughly \$40 million and more than quadruple the funding from recent biennia.

It is important to note that OHCS would continue to directly, noncompetitively fund CAAs an array of other state and federal anti-poverty funds. HB 2100 proposes to open up 20% of EHA/SHAP for CAAs and other providers to access using collaborative applications. This equates to approximately \$10M of CSL anticipated for the 21-23 biennium. For context, during the 19-21 biennium, OHCS has directly and non-competitively allocated more than \$380M to CAAs, and we are poised to provide an additional \$235M of rental assistance directly to CAAs in the next several weeks. Given this context, we believe that opening the opportunity for \$10M of EHA/SHAP for collaborative applications is an *extremely* measured, reasonable and small step toward modernizing the statute.

Beyond the funding proposal, the bill includes other important reforms, like codifying years of work co-created by OHCS and Community Action Agencies to drive towards outcomes-oriented contracting and establishing standards for service equity. In the 2018 session, OHCS received a budget note to create an outcomes-oriented contracting system. The result of that work was the EPIC (Ending homelessness, Preventing homelessness, Inclusion and diversity, Capacity of the community) approach for prioritizing outcomes and tracking performance measures. This is known as the EPIC Outcomes Tool, and it balances five shared outcomes with local flexibility in achieving those outcomes.

Another key component of HB 2100 is continued progress towards equity and racial justice. The bill calls on our grantees to join OHCS in becoming a culturally responsive agency. If passed, HB 2100 would also create expectations for homeless service providers to use nationally and regionally recognized best practices for preventing and ending homelessness, including those unique to rural communities.

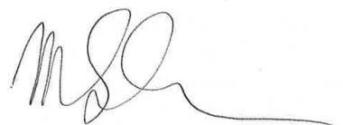
Change is hard. OHCS is proud to be leading this conversation with the committee today, and we are proud that we have continued to engage in dialogue with providers, with our Housing Stability Council, with Governor Brown’s Racial Justice Council and with the Housing Alliance. We have met individually with each CAA and worked hard to listen to the questions and concerns of CAAs and members of your committee. Our legislative concept has evolved as a result of constructive feedback. OHCS has continued to engage with advocates on this measure. Late last night the Housing Alliance voted to approve a concept that included some



key components of HB 2100 and the –1 amendment, a task force to further examine Oregon’s homeless services funding system and structure, and direct investments for culturally specific organizations. OHCS leadership will discuss this proposal later today. We have appreciated the robust dialogue within that broad coalition and look forward to more conversations about necessary system reforms.

As a funder OHCS has the responsibility to build a coordinated and concerted statewide response to the humanitarian crisis of homelessness. House Bill 2100 is an important step down that path. I urge your support.

Sincerely,



Margaret Salazar
Executive Director, Oregon Housing and Community Services

