



February 9, 2022

House Committee on Housing
Oregon Legislature
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

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

My name is Jimmy Jones and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency here in Salem, where we serve people in poverty in Marion and Polk Counties, as well as nine other Oregon counties in some programs. Across the Agency we serve more than 50,000 low-income Oregonians each year. I am also the Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon, which for nearly 40 years has been Oregon's delivery system for homeless, housing, energy, weatherization and other anti-poverty programs. Our agency operates the ARCHES Project here in Salem, which is one of the most well-known and innovative homeless service models in Oregon, and includes our Project Turnkey Motel, the ARCHES Inn.

I write today concerning a very narrow issue in the -3 amendment of House Bill 4051; writing in support of the one-year extension of the shelter siting provision from HB 2006 (2021). Back in the 2021 regular session, the siting provision was (at the time) a somewhat controversial measure given permitting, land use issues, and neighborhood concerns that often accompany the siting of community homeless shelters. But in practice those concerns were handled well at the local level. Providers worked with their local governments to arrive at the best options for shelter siting, and in most cases the shelters were opened under these new more flexible rules. In some cases community concerns did impact decisions, even with the provision in place. In short, the process worked as it should. But the shelter siting provision, most importantly, did considerably shorten timelines for acquisition and public process, so that the new shelters could be opened quickly. Given the magnitude of unsheltered homelessness in Oregon, amid the gravity of the public health crisis, this provision certainly created more bed capacity and saved lives across Oregon.

In Salem we have lost close to 50 homeless residents since the pandemic began. None of them passed away from COVID, directly. They died after they were struck by cars, overdosed on drugs, passed away in the hospital from other health problems, and in some cases died lonely deaths in unsheltered conditions. They died of all the same things the rest of us are dying from, only 20 years earlier. And too commonly, in their hour of most desperate need, they struggled to get access to basic resources, because so many of the services that they depended on, from medical care to sheltering, were diminished because of the pandemic. These new shelters that came online, in conjunction with other projects like the Navigation Centers, are saving invisible lives across our state every day. The shelter siting provision is one more tool that will help us manage the enormity of the human suffering in front of us.

There is much conversation about a second round of Project Turnkey. I talk to people across the state, and the energy behind this movement, behind this solution, has grown dramatically in recent months. Many of our rural communities would have an interest in acquiring motels for shelter, should the opportunity again emerge. They too would benefit from the flexibility afforded by shelter siting rules of the 2021 session. Given the effectiveness of the non-congregate sheltering model, I urge you to give strong consideration to an extension of the shelter siting provisions. It's our best path to more low-barrier shelter beds in Oregon.

Respectfully,



Jimmy Jones
Executive Director