



March 18, 2020

Co-Chairs Roblan and Holvey, and Members of the Committee,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is an association comprising of 15 denominations and over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, connecting hundreds of thousands of diverse members of the faith community all across the state. EMO is also a direct service provider, offering nine programs which every year serve 17,000 of Oregon's most vulnerable with key supports and opportunities.

## **EMO's Policy and Investment Recommendations**

### **End State Spending that Does Not Match Oregon's Values or this Moment of Crisis**

In this time of crisis, Oregon's elected officials must invest every state dollar judiciously to best address the vast needs of our fellow Oregonians. Continued tax breaks for the most fortunate among us are no longer tolerable. EMO urges the passage of legislation to:

- **End real estate tax breaks for the wealthiest homeowners and for those who own multiple homes**  
In the current biennium, the wealthiest 4% of Oregon taxpayers and those who own a vacation home will receive \$160m in mortgage interest tax breaks. This policy is unjustifiable in the face of worst-in-the-nation youth homelessness, a housing crisis and now the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Recapture the kicker refunds of the wealthiest Oregonians**  
Two-thirds of Oregon's \$1.6 billion 2019 kicker refund will go to the wealthiest 20% of Oregon taxpayers, and the average taxpayer in the top 1% will receive a refund of roughly \$14,000. These funds should instead go to support Oregonians now and replenish reserve funds moving forward.

### **Ensure Non-English Speakers Have the Information they Need During this Crisis**

EMO urges the legislature to invest in trusted community-based organizations to keep Oregonians whose primary language is not English informed of measures they and their families need to stay safe during the coronavirus outbreak. EMO is prepared to engage in this crucial outreach through our programs serving refugees, immigrants and the Russian-speaking community.

### **Ensure Oregon Immigrants Continue to Be Defended from Unjustified Deportation**

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is still engaged in enforcement, and cases for those in immigration detention are still going forward. Oregon's immigration legal service providers keep families together and housing and food secure by preventing unjustified deportations. These services must continue even while grant-making organizations and Oregonians are less able to financially support this work.

### **Increase Housing Access for Houseless Youth and other Housing-Insecure Oregonians**

Last school year, even before the coronavirus pandemic, over 22,000 Oregon K-12 students experienced houselessness, giving our state the highest rate of K-12 houselessness in the nation. One out of every six children and youth who experienced homelessness was unaccompanied, no longer in the physical custody of their parents or guardians. Oregon's houselessness crisis touches youth, families and seniors.

- **Pass the policy language and investments found in HB 4039 (\$2.5m)**

This bipartisan element of the Speaker's housing and homelessness package during the 2019 Legislative Session would provide housing and mental health supports to unaccompanied homeless youth.

- **Invest in cost-effective community-based home-sharing (\$500,000)**

Home-sharing programs can "develop" affordable housing for low-income seniors and others immediately by matching home-seekers with home providers. Home-sharing will likely be the only affordable housing option ready to be quickly deployed into a shocked and depleted community -- all for a fraction of the cost of traditional development. EMO is prepared to leverage its outreach and referral relationships in the senior community that has been dramatically impacted by this crisis.

### **Create a Permanent Program to Supplement SNAP Benefits; Stabilize Oregon's Food Bank Network**

- **Supplement SNAP to ensure recipients can afford the groceries they need all month long**

Individuals and families often exhaust their meager federal SNAP benefits well before the end of each month. We also know that an influx of new clients to the state's food pantry network is both unsustainable and in violation of social distancing public health guidelines.

- **Stabilize food pantries across the state to enable food pick-up during the crisis**

Like many nonprofits, Oregon's food pantries depend on thousands of volunteers, many of whom are older and are no longer able to safely leave their homes. The state should invest in paid staff to fill these vacant positions, and to ensure continued operations in the face of dwindling financial donations.

### **Ensure Food Security and Psychosocial Supports for those Living with HIV/AIDS**

As an organization that provides medically-appropriate meals to Oregonians living with HIV/AIDS, we know that many of these individuals are houseless and that many of them are vulnerable to serious complications from COVID-19. To ensure these members of our community stay healthy, we urge the Legislature to:

- **Fund meal preparation and delivery for those living with HIV/AIDS who are highly vulnerable**

Prioritize those who are at acute risk from COVID-19, specifically those who are age 55+ or who have CD4 cell counts of under 200, indicating a compromised immune system.

- **Fund meal preparation and meal distribution sites for those living with HIV/AIDS**

Enable healthy individuals to pick up a week's worth of medically-appropriate meals.

- **Ensure access to virtual psychosocial support to those living with HIV/AIDS**

During this time of uncertainty, isolation and an increased likelihood of resulting mental health complications and suicide, these supports must be seen as part of Oregon's public health response.

### **Ensure Oregon Schoolchildren Have a Complete School Year**

Oregon PreK-Higher Education students are currently shut out of their classrooms, but Oregon must ensure that every educational door is still open to them as the state recovers from the coronavirus pandemic. This is particularly imperative for low-income students, students of color and houseless students who will be disproportionately impacted by school closures. Recognizing the importance of education to human dignity and our state's future economic vitality, EMO calls on the Oregon Legislature to reassure students and their parents that the state will make the investments needed for every lost school day to be made up in the months ahead.



## ADDENDUM

### **Ensuring the Wellbeing of All Oregonians: COVID-19 Policy & Budget Responses Supported by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon**

As people of faith from diverse personal backgrounds and faith traditions, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's members share a common belief in caring for our neighbors. As the Oregon Legislature prepares its response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we share a particular commitment to ensuring that this response provides for the wellbeing of Oregon's ill, marginalized and disenfranchised. Because of our shared morals and commitment to the common good, Ecumenical Ministries supports the following policy recommendations brought forth by many of our advocacy partners from across the state.

- **Michael DeSantis, Public Policy Associate, [mdesantis@emoregon.org](mailto:mdesantis@emoregon.org)**

#### **Housing**

- **Implement statewide moratoriums on evictions and utility shut offs and late fees.**
- **Provide immediate resources for houseless service providers** to continue to provide emergency shelter, new shelter locations, increased shelter capacity including shelter capacity for people experiencing illness, and increased staff support, and to purchase hygiene supplies. Provide resources to increase access to motels and hotels to provide shelter to houseless individuals at high risk of severe illness or who are experiencing illness.
- **Expand access to TANF emergency assistance.** Enable more families to access short-term, non-recurring TANF emergency assistance. Suspend TANF work requirement. Put a moratorium on face-to-face meetings. End all program terminations.

#### **Access to Food**

- **Strengthen and increase access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).** Fast track reports of income changes so that benefit amounts can increase quickly as income goes down. Request every state option Oregon has under the federal "SNAP Pandemic Planning Guidelines" and under forthcoming federal declarations and stimulus legislation. Eliminate time limits (ABAWDs) across Oregon and recertifications. Put a moratorium on terminations. Ensure timely issuance of benefits by lowering verification requirements, eliminating interviews where possible, and committing to no pending cases. Suspend or continue all SNAP related hearings, granting continuing benefits to all, whether or not they requested them in the correct time period.
- **Ensure replacements for school meals are accessible for students during school closures.** Ensure all districts exercise the option to distribute "grab and go" meals in lieu of school meals during the entire

length of the closures. Additionally, require the Department of Education to make meal locations available publicly and School Districts to notify all students where and when “grab and go” meals are available, in all needed languages.

### Healthcare

- **Waive any fees or copayments related to testing for COVID-19** as was done in New York State and provide financial support for any uninsured individuals who must seek medical care if they contract the virus.

### Support for Workers

- **Expand access to Unemployment Insurance (UI).** Waive (or reimburse) the one-week waiting period for UI benefit. Extend UI benefits under ORS 657 to workers who are quarantined and lack paid sick leave or have insufficient paid sick time to cover the quarantine period. Extend UI benefits to workers who are caring for family members who are quarantined or for children whose school has closed. Waive work search requirements during the emergency in the interest of public health. Clarify that “good cause” to quit a job includes being forced to perform duties that jeopardize workers’ health, and needing to leave a job in order to care for family. Promote Oregon’s UI “work share” option to allow workers who are still employed but unable to work due to a temporary reduction in business hours or temporary business closure to collect partial UI benefits. Extend the 26 pay week period

### Support for BIPOC, Immigrants, and Refugees

- **Translate all information regarding COVID-19 and social services for those affected by the crisis** into necessary languages and provide interpreters where needed.
- A commitment from public health authorities, law enforcement, prosecutors, and immigration authorities that **disclosure or failure to disclose COVID-19 symptoms must not under any circumstances lead to criminalization, family court involvement, or involvement of immigration authorities.** Additionally, perform public outreach to ensure undocumented Oregonians know they can seek medical care without fear, and ensure that any medical care received will not become part of a later public charge analysis.

### Justice System

- **Release people being held for non-violent offenses and those awaiting trial** to reduce exposure for people in custody and those working in these facilities.