



March 7, 2023

Senator Aaron Woods
Representative David Gomberg
Co-Chairs, Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Transportation and Economic Development
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for HB 5019

Dear Co-Chairs Woods and Gomberg and Members of the Committee:

I write on behalf of Home Forward in strong support of House Bill 5019. This bill appropriates \$155 million for critical homelessness prevention and rehousing services including:

- \$33.6 million to prevent homelessness statewide by preventing evictions for 8,750 households statewide;
- \$85.2 million to rehouse people experiencing homelessness and expand shelter capacity in emergency areas by creating 600 new shelter beds and rehousing 1,200 homeless individuals;
- \$27.4 million to rehouse people experiencing homelessness and expand shelter capacity in the 26 rural counties that make up the Balance of State Continuum of Care;
- \$5 million to federally recognized Tribes to address homelessness needs among tribal members statewide; and
- \$3.9 million for emergency management response coordination by OHCS and ODEM.

Home Forward is a Public Housing Authority (PHA) and the largest provider of affordable housing in the state of Oregon. We serve more than 15,500 Multnomah County low-income households by providing affordable housing, administering rent assistance, and providing supportive services. Our mission is to assure that the people of our community are sheltered. We own and manage over 6,500 homes throughout Multnomah County. We also provide households with services which range from youth support to health and wellness. Meanwhile, we fund rent assistance for thousands of households residing in private unregulated housing that we do not directly oversee. We administer emergency rent assistance programs that benefit landlords and tenants alike, including Short Term Rent Assistance, the Landlord Compensation Fund, and the Landlord Guarantee Fund.

In addition to supporting HB 5019, we also ask that you make additional investments to prevent homelessness for vulnerable Oregonians through critical rent assistance and eviction prevention services. We know from experience that the greatest need, when it comes to homelessness prevention, is a robust and fully funded rent assistance program. In response to a quantitative review of Home Forward's prepandemic eviction filing, we learned that approximately 67% of evictions within Home Forward's portfolio were for nonpayment of rent or other money due. As a result, Home Forward implemented significant internal policy reform to greatly reduce the number of evictions filed and households displaced from our housing for nonpayment of rent. Some of these reforms include:

- Waiting until a certain threshold amount is due before engaging in any lease enforcement actions including the service of termination notice;

- Offering reasonable repayment agreements at all points in the lease enforcement process up through an eviction judgment;
- Dismissing a filed eviction case as soon as a repayment agreement is signed; and
- Not making the repayment agreement terms part of the Stipulated Agreement in eviction court in order to prevent an immediate eviction judgment upon noncompliance.

However, despite these reforms, the bottom line is that our families are often unable to pay their rent even when their rent is considered “affordable.” We can prevent homelessness by helping families stay stably housed when they would otherwise have to make the tough choice between paying for food, utilities, rent, or other necessary expenses. Prevention is far more cost-effective than response and rent assistance is the needed investment today to avoid higher human, financial, and societal cost tomorrow.

As a systems partner in addressing the humanitarian crisis we are seeing on our streets, Home Forward is ready to roll up our sleeves and expand capacity to serve more families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact Christina Dirks, Interim Director of Policy and Planning, Home Forward at (503) 348-1196 or christina.dirks@homeforward.org regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Christina Dirks', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christina Dirks
Interim Director of Policy and Planning
Home Forward