

To: Chair Gelser and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood

From: Liesl Wendt, Director - Multnomah County Department of Human Services

Date: March 5, 2015

RE: Support for SB 618

---

Multnomah County Human Services Department supports Senate Bill 618.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, 2,985 students (4.11%) of students in Multnomah County public schools reported being homeless; well above the statewide average (3.35%). Concurrently, 108 youth aged out of the foster care system in the county, increasing their risk of being without safe, stable housing. Each homeless youth has a different story—a different set of needs and challenges. Some are teen parents, some are addicted to drugs, and some have mental health issues. Some have spent years in foster homes. Others are forced out of their homes or abandoned by parents. Many run away from abuse. Overall, many leave their homes without official identification documents.

In order to access services, organizations and public agencies often require photo identification (ID). Lack of identification hinders homeless youth's ability to seek and maintain housing, employment, benefits, and other rights and services. Proper ID is required to obtain employment and also requested for housing program assistance. While an official ID is not required to apply for Medicaid or SNAP (food stamp) benefits, it can make it easier when picking up a SNAP card or accessing other resources. Bridging access to help homeless youth secure identification is critical to youth successfully exiting street life and integrating into a more secure and stable living situation.

Community based organizations in the county also depend on youth having photo IDs. Agencies request a photo ID with a date of birth to confirm identify and eligibility for services and complete screenings. While community partners work with youth to secure an ID, if needed, there is limited criteria and alignment across countywide agencies to facilitate the successful acquisition of ID cards by homeless youth.

Passage of this bill would create an essential foundation to ensure a coordinated approach to better serve homeless youth locally and statewide. We cannot continue to place homeless youth at risk for not accessing needed services based on their lack of ID. This bill provides a critical service to our youth and strongly aligns with the goals of the Multnomah County Runaway and Homeless Youth System of Care.

As Director for Multnomah County Department of Human Services, I'm proud to stand with the advocates behind this important legislation. It is all of our responsibility to support our youth in need and ensure access to the basic tenants of living a healthy and stable life.