



PAT FARR

Lane County Commissioner
North Eugene District
Pat.Farr@co.lane.or.us

DATE: April 15, 2015
TO: House Committee on Human Services and Housing
RE: HB 3420, relating to assistance for persons experiencing homelessness

Dear Chairwoman Keny-Guyer and Members of the Committee:

In 2014, the Lane County Board of Commissioners created the Poverty and Homelessness Board, and I serve as the Co-Chairperson of it. We formed the Board in order to formalize our priority of reducing homelessness in our region and to bring together local and regional efforts which had previously been relatively un-coordinated. The Board has membership from local and state agencies, the faith community, public safety stakeholders, and consumers.

Even at our initial meetings of the Board we identified the need to focus on early interventions, including emergency housing and related mental health services. We additionally took stock of our overall approach to reducing homelessness in our community. It is our intent to continually work on identification of gaps in our service delivery efforts, and to monitor in a cohesive way, available resources for strategically tackling the issue of homelessness.

We know that our efforts to establish dedicated camping locations with rudimentary improvements, while exceedingly well intentioned, do not meet the federal definition of emergency shelter. We also know that our public safety system has become a de facto, but inappropriate, service provider for those struggling with mental illness and substance use disorders in our communities.

We approached Representative Val Hoyle with the concept of changing state policy to be more in line with a well-established, and evidence-based practice of exploring a "housing first" model that we could implement in Eugene. Housing First provides both housing and affiliated wrap around services concurrently. It is a proven to be more fiscally efficient and leads to better outcomes than previous assistance models that require individuals to be clean and sober prior to gaining any housing assistance. The dash -3 amendment to HB 3420 provides that model, and expands this work to also include the City of Albany.

The dash -3 provides for funding that would establish a two year effort in each of these cities to provide real experience and data relative to implementing the Housing First model. I ask that the Committee adopts the -3 amendment, and moves this measure to Ways and Means for their review. I'll further suggest that we will see you in two years, with our report back to the body on both our successes and our recommendations for moving forward, or not, with a statewide policy implementing the elements of the housing first model.

ELECTRONICALLY SUBMITTED