



## Deborah Kafoury Multnomah County Chair

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Co-Chairs Johnson and Gomberg and members of the committee;

I am writing in support of the continued prioritization of funding for Emergency Housing Assistance and State Homeless Assistance Program, two critically important funding sources that help seniors, families, veterans and victims of domestic violence find safety and shelter in Multnomah County and throughout Oregon.

Our state is experiencing a housing crisis driven by rising rents, stagnant wages and flatlined federal benefits for seniors.

In Multnomah County, we have expanded our network of homeless shelters and dedicated local funds to helping keep people from losing their homes and getting them back into housing as quickly as possible.

And when the Legislature took action last year to expand EHA and SHAP, we were able to quickly utilize that funding as we expanded services for victims of domestic violence, families and seniors. This year we have doubled the number of public shelter beds in Multnomah County.

The 2016 boost in EHA and SHAP funding played a huge role in us achieving that goal.

With our share of EHA funds, the Joint Office of Homeless Services paid for Veteran's Rent Assistance, the Homesafe Teen Parenting Program, and Domestic Violence Emergency Shelter Vouchers, along with the shelter expansion.

And earlier this year residents of the Normandy Apartments in Portland received notice that their rent would go up 100 percent. Most of the residents had school aged children, and the children in that complex made up 5 percent of just one of the local schools. We were able to use EHA funds to immediately offer rent assistance to families so they could stay through the end of the school year. We then connected them with other county resources to work on a longer term plan for after the school year ended. Without EHA funds available, it is unlikely we could have helped.

Across the state counties are seeing a surge of poverty and homelessness and for smaller counties, I know that these funds are crucial to their response.

EHA and SHAP are two of the most flexible housing resources we have available. Local communities are able to braid EHA and SHAP together with local resources to use these funds in a way that meets local needs and priorities, and align with local services. The flexibility of these programs also means people can be served quickly and without the reams of paperwork required by other assistance programs. Often these programs are a bridge until longer term subsidies come through, or a temporary solution to an emergency situation.

And the emergency is widespread. Even with the increase in funds this year, we are still averaging 15 requests for assistance for every 1 household we can assist with EHA rent assistance. There are very few, if any, options for those 14 households who are turned away and many of them end up homeless.

And that is a tragedy. Because knowing that we can prevent the trauma and pain of homelessness, while telling families that there is no help today is heartbreaking. But getting someone into housing and back on track after a crisis is also the most expensive way to end homelessness.

So I hope that the Legislature will continue to prioritize these vital resources that help us prevent and end homelessness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Kafoury". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah Kafoury  
Multnomah County Chair