

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Interchurch Center, Suite B ■ 0245 SW Bancroft Street ■ Portland, Oregon 97239
phone (503) 221-1054 ■ *fax* (503) 223-7007 ■ *Web site* www.emoregon.org

March 20, 2017

Dear Chair and Members of the Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development,

My name is Britt Conroy, and I am Public Policy Director at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. EMO is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and public policy advocacy.

I write today on behalf of the EMO board of directors regarding HB 5012, a bill to fund programs administered by Oregon's Housing and Community Services Department, including the Emergency Housing Account & State Homeless Assistance Program (EHA/SHAP).

EMO encourages the Legislature to invest \$50 million in EHA/SHAP.

Furthermore, EMO encourages the Legislature to reprioritize the state's housing budget, away from the mortgage interest deduction and toward investments in EHA/SHAP and other programs that provide safety, shelter and dignity for all. This reprioritization can be achieved through the work of this Subcommittee, and through the passage of HB 2006.

We believe that all persons deserve a safe, stable and affordable place to call home. As currently designed, Oregon's mortgage interest deduction undercuts this most basic of values, directing millions of dollars in tax breaks to some of the most well-off among us instead of investing in affordable homeownership, affordable rental homes and supportive services to prevent and address homelessness.

The EMO board's support for \$50 million in funding for EHA/SHAP and for HB 2006 stems not simply from the perspectives of board members as faith leaders from across the state, but as managers of an organization that offers housing to homeless youth through our Second Home program, housing support to survivors of domestic violence who are clients at our Russian Oregon Social Services program, housing to residents at our affordable housing complex in North Portland and housing to newly arrived refugees who start new lives through our SOAR Refugee Resettlement program.

Finally, EMO knows well that the legislative discussion about the funding of the Housing and Community Services Department and the prioritization of our state's housing dollars is not merely a housing debate. Youth who have stable homes are more likely to succeed in school. Thus, this is an education debate. Individuals who live in mold-infested homes are more likely to suffer from worse health. This, then, is a public health debate. And homeownership can be a key to stability and even wealth creation. This is a debate about who is allowed to join the middle class.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns, and for your efforts to address Oregon's housing needs.

Sincerely,
Britt Conroy
Public Policy Director, EMO