

The Honorable Jeff Reardon, Chair
House Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee

Dear Chair Reardon and members of the Committee:

The City of Gresham strongly supports HB 4042, which would launch a pilot program to provide targeted workforce training to 1,000 Oregonians experiencing abject poverty. This bill is particularly well-timed, given the skills training needed for gainful employment, recently highlighted in the Governor's State of the State Address. HB 4042 could open up that access to opportunity in Gresham's Rockwood Neighborhood in East Multnomah County, which is home to some of the densest concentrations of poverty in Oregon. For context, following are some key data points regarding the areas of Gresham that would be served by HB 4042:

- The Rockwood area of East Multnomah County is extremely young. Rockwood's median age is 27, and 40% of households have a child under 18 in the home.
- The neighborhood is also very diverse, with 50% of the population being non-white, and over 60 languages spoken in Rockwood homes.
- Immigrants make up 34% of Rockwood's population, compared to 14.2% in Multnomah County.
- Educational attainment is a struggle. The Reynolds School District, which serves this area, has the lowest on-time graduation rates and highest number of dropouts in the region.
- Poverty is a substantial issue, with 35% of people living below the poverty line, and 40% of households receiving SNAP/food assistance.
- These poverty numbers increase in Rockwood's minority communities. In the Latino community, poverty afflicts 54% of the population, and 65.9% of the African American population is in poverty.
- Rockwood's 97233 zip code is the "unhealthiest" zip code in Oregon according to the Truven Index.

These data points hint at a dangerous combination of social and economic circumstances. Lives in Rockwood can be profoundly improved through new economic opportunity, which is exactly what HB 4042 attempts to catalyze. In addition, the state investment in the bill opens up the opportunity for federal matching funds, and builds exciting new partnerships with private sector, public sector, and higher education. The need is clear and profound, and HB 4042 offers an opportunity to build a new workforce training and economic opportunity model, which is scalable statewide. The City of Gresham urges the Committee's strong support.

Sincerely,

Eric Chambers
Government Relations Director