



To: Oregon Legislature
Re: Public Testimony on Coronavirus Response

March 17, 2020

Dear Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislature,

I am the executive director of Blanchet House, a nonprofit serving the homeless, low-income, elderly, and vulnerable in our state. Since 1952, the cities in which we operate have relied on our free meal, clothing, and housing programs to fill in service gaps. Blanchet House served 325,000 meals last year along with housing 150 men in our life-saving housing programs in Portland and at a farm in Carlton.

Due to the COVID19 (coronavirus) pandemic, many of our fellow social service providers have been forced to close or limit their services. We remain resolute in serving the hungry by adjusting our program to now include to-go meals, free to anyone in need. These unplanned changes to our service are causing us to incur many new costs like purchasing to-go containers for meals, non-perishable foods, overtime hours for staff, gasoline to pick up donated food from canceled events and closed restaurants, and extra cleaning and sanitizing supplies. We are one of the only organizations able to collect, store, process, prepare and serve food donated from businesses like the Oregon Convention Center. If not for us, this food would go to a landfill. Instead, Blanchet House is getting it to the poor, homeless and hungry at no cost to Oregon taxpayers.

Our residential program has been forced to hold off on accepting any new participants so we can reserve space in the event of needing to isolate symptomatic residents. We receive calls daily from people desperate to get off the street. Mothers and fathers call asking us to let their suffering loved ones stay with us so they can gain sobriety and build a new healthy life. We are at capacity, and the need is going to grow as the economic impact of this crisis is felt.

As a passionately independent organization, Blanchet House has never received or asked for taxpayers' money. We are and have always been solely funded by individuals like you, businesses, grants, and foundations. We must ensure that we can continue to offer our meal and housing services during this health crisis and years after. We're asking the state legislature to include funding for Blanchet House in the amount of \$500,000. Our current annual budget is \$1.4 million with a staff of only 11 people. This additional funding from the state would allow us to continue our critical services.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity and time to be heard today. We are here to represent the invisible and forgotten citizens of our fine state. We strive to lift them up, alleviate suffering, and give them a hand so they can prosper.

Sincerely,

Scott Kerman
Executive Director

[Blanchet House of Hospitality](https://www.blanchethouse.org)

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