

March 19, 2020

Attn: Joint Committee on Coronavirus Response

Co-Chairs Roblan and Holvey, and members of the committee:

I am writing on behalf of Cascade AIDS Project (CAP) to urge you to prioritize the vital needs of vulnerable people living with HIV in Oregon's response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

People living with HIV who are not "virally suppressed" (i.e., those whose HIV is not well-controlled) are at greater risk than the general population of developing serious, potentially life-threatening symptoms from COVID-19. Unfortunately, an estimated 36% of those infected with HIV in Oregon—3,139 people—are not virally suppressed. Many members of this population are also experiencing homelessness or housing instability, further increasing their risk of acute COVID-19.

Each year in Oregon, CAP provides housing and other support to more than 850 people living with HIV and experiencing homelessness. Our agency is already witnessing the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on our clients. The rate of requests for emergency rent assistance has doubled since last week as clients have been laid off or seen their work hours reduced. Meanwhile, our housing staff is working with immunocompromised clients who are sleeping in public shelters or outdoors, but now more than ever need a safe, private place to stay. Neither CAP nor our partners in Oregon's HIV-services system have the resources to rapidly, adequately meet these needs under normal conditions, much less during this crisis.

For people living with HIV—including myself—our government's response to an epidemic is of special significance. For many, the current situation evokes feelings of fear and abandonment. I am asking the committee to help heal that trauma, and protect some of those most at risk of COVID-19, by ensuring that the state's response to the epidemic fully addresses the housing and healthcare needs of vulnerable people living with HIV.

Sincerely,

Tyler TerMeer

Chief Executive Officer, Cascade AIDS Project
