



Oregon

Governor Kate Brown

Housing and Community Services

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October 22, 2020

The Honorable Senator Peter Courtney, Co-Chair
The Honorable Representative Tina Kotek, Co-Chair
State Emergency Board
900 Court Street NE
H-178 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301-4048

RE: Need for Additional Shelter in Response to COVID and Recent Wildfires

Dear Co-Chair Kotek, Co-Chair Courtney, and Members of the Joint Emergency Board,

COVID has changed the lives of Oregonians and upended many safety net systems, including Oregon's shelter network. Sheltering Oregonians without housing is more challenging and expensive due to physical distancing requirements. Additionally, wildfires devastations have caused major damage to ecosystems, human lives, and property throughout the state that amplifies the existing sheltering needs. OHCS is requesting resources during Friday's Emergency Board to meet the most urgent needs. We are also supporting the Project Turnkey requests brought forward by the unique, multi-sector partnership.

This new crisis, on top of the existing public health epidemic, requires intentional investments and strategies that prioritize ensuring sufficient shelter capacity, particularly as the winter months approach. Additionally, there is a need to consider new, innovative models of sheltering, as non-congregate shelter is imperative in a COVID-19 environment. We know that the pandemic and the wildfires have had a disproportionate impact on communities of color across Oregon, further impacting the very families most vulnerable to these concurrent crises. This is a short term but critical measure to ensure the health and safety of Oregonians continues to be prioritized.

As detailed in our earlier letter to the Co-Chairs, OHCS is requesting \$10 M to support safe sheltering. These resources will be delivered to regional Community Action Agencies with the expectations that culturally specific organizations and other services providers will be engaged in the implementation planning for these resources. In wildfire impacted communities, OHCS will require grantees to coordination with county emergency command centers to make best and highest use of state funds. These resources are needed as sheltering costs are higher with the non-congregant model, as each existing facility must serve less people. Additionally, providers must utilize staff to run the shelter because of health risks associated with the older volunteers that have historically operated shelter.

We also know that the existing shelters are be insufficient to meet the needs of Oregonians experiencing homelessness before COVID and wildfire. Oregon lacks shelter infrastructure, and this challenges have been exacerbated. Project Turnkey, a statewide collaborative of experienced local social services providers, local government, housing and real estate experts, and philanthropy, have met for months to develop plans to quickly acquire hotel/motels to use as non-congregant shelter, inspired by a model in California and other states to quickly increase shelter capacity.

The Oregon Community Foundation will administer the funds with the support of OHCS and other members of the Project Turnkey's Advisory Committee. OHCS will serve in advisory capacity offering staff expertise to the project and bring in shelter best practices, alignment with priorities for existing state and federal resources, ensuring inclusive community strategies and support with deed restrictions to ensure protection of public funds to make the program as successful as possible. I won't mince words – Project Turnkey is an ambitious program and will be a heavy lift for all partners around the table. But that is what this moment calls for. Oregon must continue to meet the moment and find new ways to serve all in our communities.

I urge your support of these sheltering asks. As Oregon responds to these concurrent crises, the requested resources will provide support to our most vulnerable community members and help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MSL', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Margaret Solle Salazar, Executive Director