

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Noble and Members of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing,

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, organizations and interfaith partners. We work to improve the lives of Oregonians through housing and other direct service programs, dialogue and advocacy.

No other state has a children and youth homeless rate as high as Oregon.ⁱ

During part of 2018, if a Portland Public Schools student experiencing homelessness asked her school's homelessness liaison for help, she did not receive a housing voucher, and she did not receive a bed at a shelter. The student and her family were handed a tent.ⁱⁱ

In Lincoln County, where EMO operates a program placing unaccompanied homeless youth with volunteer home providers, one in six students experienced homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year. Parts of Lane County have rates as high as nearly one in three students experiencing homelessness.ⁱⁱⁱ

The sheer numbers of this crisis are staggering. Nearly 22,000 students experienced homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year, impacting families in every corner of the state:

- McMinnville School District: 199 students experienced homelessness;
- Oregon City School District: 280 students;
- Redmond School District: 393 students;
- Bend-La Pine School District: 467 students;
- Beaverton School District: nearly 1,800 students;
- Tillamook School District: One in ten students experienced homelessness.^{iv}

A survey conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors stated that "the most frequently cited reasons for family homelessness are a lack of affordable housing, poverty, and domestic violence."^v

We see the link between domestic violence, homelessness and, importantly, skewed state housing funding priorities play out right here in Oregon. In 2017, according to Governor Brown's Housing Agenda released in August, 8323 requests for emergency shelter could not be met because Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault shelters were full. A chilling 8300 times. That means that on average, we turned our back on 23 survivors and their children day in and day out in this state.^{vi}

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness and research published in the journal, "Pediatrics," children who are homeless are more likely to have moderate to severe acute and chronic health problems.^{vii}

The Child Trends Database, citing research from the National Center on Family Homelessness, notes that: “Children without stable homes are more than twice as likely as others to repeat a school grade, be expelled or suspended, or drop out of high school. A quarter or more of homeless children have witnessed violence, and more than half have problems with anxiety and depression.”^{viii}

Nationally^{ix}:

- Latinx youth have a 33% higher risk of reporting homelessness.
- African American youth have an 83% higher risk of reporting homelessness.
- LBGQTQIA+ youth have a 120% higher risk of reporting homelessness.
- Youth reporting a household annual income of less than \$24,000 have a 162% higher risk of reporting homelessness.
- Unmarried parenting youth have a 200% higher risk of reporting homelessness.

Our organization’s own experience leads us to believe that investment is what is needed to address this crisis. Over the past decade in the Beaverton School District, unaccompanied homeless youth graduated at a rate of 44%. Youth in EMO’s Second Home program, who are placed with a volunteer home provider, graduated at a rate of 96%. Stable housing leads to more stable homes.

HB 3349 reforms the mortgage interest deduction and offers a stark choice -- one that EMO sees in clear moral terms: Affordable home ownership and providing housing to children with families and youth who are experiencing homelessness are more important than this tax break.

Thank you.

ⁱ Achen, Paris. “Oregon Ranks First for Homeless Youth,” *East Oregonian*. August 8, 2018. Available at: https://www.eastoregonian.com/news/local/oregon-ranks-first-for-homeless-youth/article_71a7f120-6139-526c-8c02-8040d6bc0b66.html

ⁱⁱ Information shared by Portland Public Schools McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Services staff, February 22, 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ Oregon Department of Education, Homeless Student Data: Homeless Student Percentages by District. Available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/ESEA/McKinney-Vento/Documents/Homeless%20Student%20Percent%20by%20District%2017-18%20for%20web.xlsx>.

^{iv} Ibid. Also: Oregon Department of Education, Homeless Student Data: PreK-12 District Counts by Living Situation. Available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/ESEA/McKinney-Vento/Documents/PreK-12%20District%20Counts%20by%20Living%20Situation%2017-18%20-%20for%20web.xlsx>

^v United States Conference of Mayors. (2009). Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A status report on hunger and homelessness in America’s cities. Available at: <http://usmayors.org/HHSurvey2007/hhsurvey07.pdf>

^{vi} “Housing Policy Agenda.” August 30, 2018. Available at <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/policy/documents/housing%20agenda%20final.pdf>

^{vii} Referenced at Child Trends Databank. (2015). *Homeless children and youth*. Available at: <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/homeless-children-and-youth>. Research from Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., Rinaldi, M., Masten, A. S., and Oberg, C. N. (2010). Asthma and behavior in homeless 4- to 7-year-olds. *Pediatrics*, 125, 145-151.

^{viii} Child Trends Databank. (2015). *Homeless children and youth*. Available at: <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/homeless-children-and-youth>

^{ix} “Voices of Youth Count”, University of Chicago. November 2017. Available at <http://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/national-estimates-of-youth-homelessness/>