

Testimony in support of Policy Package 108 – Reducing Childhood Homelessness

Jill Tucker – Director of Development, St. Francis Shelter

- Today 1200 children will take their seats in classrooms throughout the Salem-Keizer school district and wonder:
 - Where will they sleep tonight?
 - Where will they do their homework?
 - Will they have a place for dinner?
 - Will they be safe when that last bell rings?
- Those 1200 children are homeless – and many of them leave school every afternoon to uncertainty – frequently sleeping in cars or other places not meant for people to live
- Elijah and Gabriel were two of those children, fleeing domestic violence with their mom, Tierra
 - Tierra was a veteran with an honorable discharge, working a steady job at a local care facility, and studying for her CNA credential – but...
 - Tierra’s partner was abusive, and when Tierra knew she and her boys weren’t safe, she did the only thing she could do – flee.
 - She didn’t have enough money for an apartment and could only spend a few nights in a motel – so she and her boys started sleeping in their car
 - She kept her job, kept her boys safe, and kept studying, but dreaded having to make it through those nights alone with her boys afraid for their safety and their future
 - Tierra came to St. Francis and thrived – she finished her CNA exams and received her certification, found a better and higher paying job, and found a home for herself and her sons in a safe neighborhood with good schools
- At St. Francis Shelter we help 30-40 families like Tierra’s every year – as the largest transitional shelter for homeless families, we see this need every single day
 - We operate at full capacity year-round, our waiting list is always full, but most heartbreaking is our named but not served list
 - These families have names, stories, and need our services but when they call, we are not able to serve them. For every family we are able to serve, two families have their names placed on this list
 - We serve families fleeing domestic violence, families are seeking to reunite with their children from foster care, families in recovery, families who simply cannot afford rent
 - 90% of our families have successfully completed our program and secured safe, stable, permanent housing
- Salem’s rents are unaffordable for most low-income families and this lack of affordable housing means more people are sleeping on the couches of friends and families, crowded into spare rooms, or, most devastatingly, out on the street

- I could tell you that homelessness in Oregon is up 4% from last year, that our PIT counts increased 20% from 2018, and 13% of all homeless families are found in Marion and Polk counties
- But I'll pass on that and state simply that homelessness is among the worst things which can happen to a child
 - Homeless children have a much greater chance of being homeless as adults, of struggling in school, and of facing life-long health consequences
 - We have a finite amount of time to reach these children to avoid these long-lasting consequences and traumas
- The proposed \$20 million to end child and family homelessness will increase access to rent help and stabilization, increase the number of families we can serve in our transitional housing, and work towards one day eliminating that Named but Not Served list, because no family should be homeless.

Thank you.