

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
Attention: Co-Chair Manning, Co-Chair Gomberg, and Members of the Committee.

Good afternoon,

My name is Margot van der Bie and I am a housing advocate with Volunteers of America, Oregon Home Free. I am writing to you today to support the vital services available through SB 5512 and to demonstrate the vital impact your support has on the women and families we work with. At Home Free, we serve victims and survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault through our emergency and transitional services programs, crisis hotline, legal advocacy program, and much more. As a Transitional & Emergency Services Advocate, my role is to meet participants where they currently are, both emotionally and physically through our mobile advocacy model to find them safe and stable housing. It is our mission that no survivor in the Portland area should have barriers to receiving our services due to transportation or accessibility needs. Home Free advocates work to find survivors safe and stable housing after fleeing a violent relationship is invaluable -this is truly lifesaving work. Through both our short-term rental assistance programs and our long-term coordinated access housing program, I meet regularly with participants of our programs who are in varying stages of their search for safe housing after fleeing an abusive relationship. Whether some folks are still living in homes where violence occurs daily and are safety planning with me to flee to a shelter, or some who need my help breaking her current lease and moving to a new permanent unit that we found together, the services we offer ensure that survivors don't have to navigate the complex housing system on their own. Advocates are able to holistically support our participants through the complex emotional process of leaving an abusive relationship while also acting as a navigator through elaborate systems to ensure the participant has her most immediate needs met. At Home Free, we believe safety is a human right and every person, specifically survivors who face unique barriers, deserves a safe home that will allow their family to heal.

In Multnomah County where Volunteers of America, Oregon operates, for every 100 families with extremely low incomes, there are only 22 affordable units available. Oregon also has one of the nation's highest rates of violence against women--over a million Oregon women and girls have been victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault (more than half the female population). It is the unique combination of adequate funding to meet the physical needs of the families we serve as well as offering an advocate's role in case management to ensure wrap around services and culturally specific needs are being met for each survivor. I am writing you today in strong support of SB 5512 as an advocate who currently utilizes Emergency Housing Account (EHA) dollars to ensure my participants are free from both violence and homelessness. Through additional resources to support preventing and ending homelessness via investments in the Emergency Housing Account and State Homeless Assistance Program, you ensure that survivors have the proper access and support they need to flee violence and be off the streets. Many domestic and sexual violence shelters are unable to house families longer than 30 days while the average length of time it takes a homeless family to secure housing is 6-10 months. The availability of the emergency services for these families provided in SB 5512

helps to close the gap on services that creates additional barriers to women escaping domestic violence.

Too often, there just aren't enough funds to meet the need that is currently knocking at our doors, let alone hopes of expansion and growth to better meet the unique needs of each participant. I am grateful and humbled by the work I do assisting survivors of violence in finding safe housing, but I am aware daily that the need in our community far outweighs the availability of funds to adequately support the need. The extra burden this puts on advocates to creatively brainstorm to fill the gap between services and resources takes time away from working directly with participants to help them in their healing. Recovering from domestic and sexual violence for survivors isn't just about having a safe rental unit--it's about feeling empowered to start this new chapter with the necessary tools and resources to thrive.

When I am working with a survivor to who has obtained a new safe unit, the ripple effects are profound and widespread. One family that I worked with this year faced incredible barriers to accessing safe housing and the impact that living in fear at her current unit had on this participant affected every aspect of her and her daughter's life. But once we were able to sign a lease at her new unit and provide moving cost assistance to get her and her daughter into the new unit, layers and layers of fear and insecurity shed and allowed this family to start healing. Because of finding safe housing, accessing Oregon's Address Confidentiality Program, safety planning with her advocate, and having someone to advocate for her with her landlord and employer, she was able to focus on the immediate necessary steps of emotionally healing with her daughter. Today she tells me that joy has returned to their home, her daughter's performance at school increased, and she is more focused at work. Ensuring that Oregonian survivors have access to safe housing not only means they will be able to heal from trauma, but will ensure that their families are able to fully participate in our social and economic processes in Oregon.

Not only would an increase in EHA and SHAP funding assist the programs that already exist and support survivors with immediate needs of housing, but it also ensures that future programs can develop, expand, and adapt to meet the needs of more survivors to ensure that marginalized survivors have equitable access to support in their own communities. Therefore, we are asking for \$50 million in on-going funds for the Emergency Housing Account and State Homeless Assistance Program and an additional \$5 million for the DV Housing Navigator Program. Safe housing is not only a human right, but creates boundless opportunities for Oregon women and families to reinvest in our state. I thank you so much for your time and your continued support of victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Together, we will continue to work towards the goal of safe housing for every Oregonian.

Thank you again,

M. van der Bie

Margot van der Bie

Pronouns: She/Her