



Testimony in Support of House Bill 4001 (-1 amendment)
House Committee on Human Services and Housing

Speaker of the House Tina Kotek
February 5, 2020

Chair Keny-Guyer, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the -1 amendment to House Bill 4001. The amendment replaces the underlying bill.

Last August, Oregon Housing and Community Services released the Oregon Statewide Shelter Study.¹ The study concluded (page 43): “Homelessness, especially unsheltered homelessness, is of catastrophic proportions in Oregon.”

The study included some staggering figures, particularly that Oregon is one of four states in which more than half (61 percent) of all people experiencing homelessness were found in unsheltered locations. That figure has since risen to 64 percent, which is more than 10,000 people, according to the state’s most recent point-in-time count. The study said we need nearly 6,000 additional shelter beds to provide necessary shelter for Oregonians experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

We must approach this data with an emergency mindset. If a natural disaster struck and displaced the number of people I’ve just referenced, we wouldn’t sit on our hands and wait for the problem to get better. We would take immediate action and do something to get our citizens into temporary shelter or permanent housing.

This is a statewide emergency – 75 percent of unhoused Oregonians live outside the Portland metropolitan area.² Communities simply need more help to protect those in need. Too many cities and towns have had difficulty establishing locations for low-barrier shelters that can save lives. We need to reduce barriers that are keeping people from getting shelter.

I am not blaming local government. We, the Legislature and state government, are partners in this effort, and this bill can make us an even stronger partner. While we have managed to double the dollars flowing to communities through Emergency Housing Assistance (EHA) and the State Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) over the last two biennia, we should take the opportunity of this session to step up further by providing one-time funds and technical assistance to create more shelter and related services by this coming fall.

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/ISD/RA/Oregon-Statewide-Shelter-Study.pdf>

² <https://news.streetroots.org/2020/01/17/yes-declaring-statewide-emergency-homelessness>

The goal of this bill is to make sure communities can move quickly to establish additional shelters before next winter. We can't go another winter without more shelter beds.

In short, House Bill 4001 with the -1 amendment would: (1) declare a state of emergency to require local jurisdictions to waive land use requirements and expedite siting of emergency shelters; and (2) direct the state to allocate money and provide technical assistance to help our local partners.

The -1 amendment:

- Waives all siting, design, and zoning regulations and the land use appeals process for approving the siting of emergency shelters. Local jurisdictions would be required to site shelters in their communities unless there is a public health or safety issue identified within the structure itself. This authority would expire July 1, 2021.
- Expands the options for transitional housing locations.
- Allocates \$40 million to increase low-barrier shelter capacity and other services, specifically acquiring/preparing a location, rapid re-housing assistance, resources for public hygiene facilities, and two navigation centers in Salem and Eugene to help connect individuals to services and pathways to permanent housing.

The next amendment to the bill will refine how Oregon Housing and Community Services will distribute the funds. My goal is to allow the agency discretion to expedite getting the resources to communities in need.

I look forward to hearing from stakeholders about how to improve this bill, and we look forward to returning to the committee next week with further suggestions.

This effort, this session, is just one part of a multifaceted approach the Legislature has been undertaking to address the housing crisis in our state. This bill will not solve every problem, but it is a near-term solution that I hope we can all support.

Thank you for the time and I'm happy to take your questions.