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Chair Williams, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rev. Andrea Cano, and I serve as the Interim President at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). We engage denominational leadership, and over 150 congregations, organizations, interfaith and community partners, to improve the lives of Oregonians through collaboration and advocacy, especially for our housing and other direct services programs.

LC 201 represents a chance to stand alongside Oregon's school-aged youth as they confront the realities of experiencing homelessness. We are all called to work with these impressive young people to create a future where all students have access to safe, stable and affordable housing, and where their aspirations as young adults are not hampered by all that they have so courageously overcome.

Oregon has the highest rate of youth homelessness in the United States. More than 22,000 children – five to 18 years old - experienced homelessness in the year prior to the pandemic.¹ Oregon's youth homelessness crisis impacts those on the margins most. Black youth are nearly 3 times more likely than white youth to experience homelessness nationwide, and about one-third of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQIA+.²

Housing instability, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, poses a drastic threat to youths' future success. Just 54% of homeless students in Oregon graduate from high school, the lowest graduation rate among all major demographics tracked by the Oregon Department of Education.³

These are difficult facts to grasp.

Passage of LC 201 will, first, enable a critical expansion of services for young people in need.

Second, we know that youth who experience homelessness without family and community support face the same challenges as young adults who came out of the foster care system. These formerly homeless youth are not eligible for the same supports.

LC 201 addresses this disparity by expanding eligibility for two programs: the Independent Living Housing Subsidy Program and Oregon's Foster Youth Tuition and Fee Waiver.

They will ensure formerly homeless youth who are transitioning into adulthood have access to affordable housing and higher education so that they may thrive and build their futures.

¹ WalletHub; <https://bit.ly/30EbyCr>

² National Network for Youth; <https://bit.ly/3GreIJC>

³ Oregon Department of Education; <https://bit.ly/2ZI5usc>

Third, LC 201 not only provides crucial supports for those who are experiencing houselessness, the bill also invests in keeping students in housing and school in the first place. Nationally, youth experiencing homelessness have an 87% likelihood of dropping out of school.⁴ LC 201 builds on the work done by Portland Public Schools to create a fund for rental assistance and rapid rehousing specifically for students and their families.

In 2019, Portland Public Schools created a pilot fund of \$28,000 to keep students housed or rapidly rehouse them if they became homeless. This fund helped 114 students from 41 different families maintain stable housing at a cost of just \$245 per student.

LC 201 would appropriate funding for the creation of similar funds in communities across the state, with pilot programs particularly focused in school districts with the highest percentage or highest number of homeless students.

Not only would this investment benefit students and their families by providing them a dedicated pool of money for rental assistance, it would ease the significant demand on existing rental assistance funds, benefitting other members of the community also seeking this support.

EMO is grateful that this committee has agreed to lift up our young people by introducing LC 201. We stand ready to partner with you in the weeks ahead to pass this bill.

On behalf of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, I thank you for your support.

In partnership,

The Rev. Andrea Cano

⁴ SchoolHouse Connection; <https://bit.ly/30vUbDX>