



Co-Chair Johnson, Co-Chair Steiner-Hayward, Co-Chair Rayfield, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. As the Executive Director of p:ear, I am dedicated to ensuring homeless youth have the relationships, opportunities and experiences they deserve to navigate the personal and difficult journey out of homelessness and grow into a healthy and thriving adulthood. I am writing to advocate for full funding for HB 2544, to provide and ensure a comprehensive continuum of services for Oregon's unaccompanied homeless youth, those who are not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians, and who are homeless.

Homelessness is a tragedy – it is not just a personal tragedy – it is a tragedy for our entire community. For many young people the pathway out of homelessness and into housing is incredibly challenging and once housed, deeply stabilizing. Housing restores your humanity and inspires hope for a more connected and healthy future.

I hope you will join me in affirming housing as a basic human right for all Oregonians, especially our youth. Oregon ranks among the first in the nation for our homeless youth population. However, we invest less than 1/12th the amount our neighbors in Washington State.

We must come together as a state to create lasting, systemic change to ensure that young people have multiple avenues and options to services + housing and are free from the trenches of housing instability and homelessness. Lacking safe and adequate housing not only strips people of their dignity, it has both calamitous personal and economic impacts: homelessness generates expenses for a community, not income; stable housing + access to services is critical for the welfare of one's financial, physical and mental health.

HB2544 provides \$2.2M to support host home providers across Oregon, a model with a strong national reputation, for which Oregon is considered a leader in programming. Host Homes provide youth with long-term housing supports as well as a stable home, family, and support system while they attend school and create their futures. HB2544 also provides \$2.2 to expand or enhance existing UHY shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, mental health/substance use services, and other transitional housing options.

In the United States, half of homeless adults first experienced homelessness in their youth. We know that by investing in services for this population that we can and will deter lifetimes of housing instability and homelessness. Every child and young adult deserves to have access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive. HB 2544 ensures that is a reality for our young Oregonians experiencing the traumatic and dynamic effects of homelessness.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Beth Burns, p:ear
Executive Director
beth@pearmentor.org