



February 22nd, 2021

House Committee on Human Services
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 2544 - Authorizes Department of Human Services to award two-year grants to organizations that provide services to unaccompanied homeless youth and to organizations that operate host home projects for unaccompanied homeless youth.

Dear Chair Williams, Vice-Chair Leif, Vice-Chair Ruiz and members of the House Committee on Human Services -

On behalf of HomePlate Youth Services, we are writing to express our strong support for House Bill 2544, adding much needed funding resources to organizations providing critical services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

For 16 years, HomePlate has provided a free, safer space for youth experiencing homelessness to build supportive relationships with adults, access on-site resources and gain referrals to other services like job search, housing stability, education resources, parenting resources and ID assistance which are often difficult to navigate. We are Washington County's only non-profit provider of drop-in centers and street outreach for youth experiencing homelessness.

In 2005, HomePlate hosted the first weekly drop-in service in Hillsboro providing free meals and resources to youth between the ages of 12-24. Since that time, with great support from partnering jurisdictions, the community and a dedicated team of staff and volunteers, HomePlate has expanded its broad reach across Washington County, serving on average 500 unduplicated youth (*pre-covid*) through our drop-in and street outreach services in response to the need.

Prior to COVID-19, the Beaverton School District had experienced the highest number of homeless students in the State. Today, even more vulnerable homeless youth are experiencing tougher times and obstacles. Their lives are severely impacted by unemployment, housing instability and medical needs, and are in a precarious position, disconnected from ways to identify how and where to seek help. Many times, their search ends on the streets of Portland, immersed in negative acculturation and influences which can be difficult to emerge from.

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During COVID-19, the needs of homeless youth have been exacerbated, with many resources including shelters, drop-in centers, outreach and adult mentoring support operating under limited capacity. Like many of our service partners, HomePlate has adapted to ensure homeless youth have safe and reliable access to the support we provide.

As we continue to see a growing need in our community dealing with housing insecurity, job loss and hunger we encourage our legislators to act boldly and enhance State resources to address the needs of our most vulnerable community members. We know that outcomes are better when people are served in their home communities. We also know that when the most vulnerable among us are supported, that our communities become stronger as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Bridget Calfee, Executive Director

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