



**Mid-Columbia
Community
Action Council**

Mid-Columbia Community Action Council
Serving Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties
312 E. 4th St, The Dalles, OR 97058
606 State St, Suite 1B, Hood River, OR 97031
Tel: (541) 298-5131
www.MCCAC.com

February 7th, 2022

RE: House Bill 4123

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Morgan and Campos and Members of the House Housing Committee,

My name is Kenny LaPoint and I am the Executive Director of Mid-Columbia Community Action Council (MCCAC) serving Hood River, Wasco and Sherman Counties. At MCCAC our mission is to build a better future for our community through partnership and equity-centered programs that prevent and eliminate poverty and houselessness. I am writing to you today to urge your support of House Bill 4123, which establishes locally-led, regional coordination of efforts to prevent and end houselessness through eight pilot projects across the state. Should HB 4123 pass, one of those pilots would be led by MCCAC and include the local governments of Hood River, Wasco and Sherman Counties along with the City of Hood River and The Dalles. This regional structure, as a pilot, would provide great insight and learning for the state of Oregon due to the unique nature of the region; with a three-county population of just over 50,000, including two defined rural communities and one community defined as frontier, according to the Oregon Office of Rural Health's geographic definitions. With 26 of Oregon's 36 counties considered either rural or frontier, this Mid-Columbia pilot would bring critical balance and a better representation of the needs of our entire state. Our region would also provide insight into a diverse demographical makeup that includes Latinx and Native community members.

Should HB 4123 pass, MCCAC would look to utilize the allocated funding to implement the regional strategic plan that it is currently developing through the "Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative" (referred to as "The Collaborative"). The Collaborative consists of elected officials from across the region, culturally specific organizations, Native and/or Tribal service providers, persons with lived experience, the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority, the regional Coordinated Care Organization, the Mid-Columbia Center for Living (MCCFL, the regional behavioral health provider) and others who operate within the region's houseless service system. The Collaborative strategic planning process and development was funded by Providence Health Systems in late 2021. To date, stakeholder and community member interviews have been conducted as well as interviews with people with lived experience of houselessness and Native, Latinx and People of Color. These interviews will be used throughout the planning process to inform and direct goals and policy priorities that will be set through the plan. In addition to goals and policy priorities, it is anticipated that the plan will include the following key elements:

- Shared set of values
- Mission statement
- Vision statement
- Equity statement
- Data sets that drive plan goals and strategies
- Stakeholder and community member outreach and interviews to anecdotally inform the plan; including interviews with those with lived experience, communities of color, Native, Latinx and LGBTQIA+ community members
- Core set of plan goals with accompanying metrics
- Implementation strategies and timelines to achieve the plan goals
- Designated organizations to carry out the strategies

- Reporting structure
- Funding Plan

Upon completion of the plan, which is anticipated later in 2022, funding would be needed to implement and operationalize. As previously mentioned, that is where HB 4123 would come into play. We would direct the funding provided through HB 4123 to make the work happen. This includes funding key positions that would see the plan through and coordinate across the three-county service territory. These positions include a Regional Coordinator to help monitor follow through and ensure on-going coordination of The Collaborative; a Grants and Fund Developer to develop a plan for sustainability through long-term resources; and Outreach and Engagement Coordinators that would conduct community-based outreach to persons experiencing houselessness including Veterans, people with disabilities, Latinx, Native and community members of color who have been disproportionately impacted by housing instability. Our region would also utilize a portion of HB 4123 funding to provide direct services that are in alignment with our strategic plan.

I have no doubt that the Mid-Columbia region could provide some great insight into how rural houselessness can and should be addressed. The state of Oregon can serve to learn a lot from our small, but mighty community and its collaborative nature. Over the past few years we have proven our ability to successfully set a vision and implement programs. The \$3.1 million collaborative Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG-CV2) is a great example of that. MCCAC led the grant application process and the collaborative consists of six regional service providers, in addition to MCCAC. This includes the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority, The Next Door Inc. (culturally responsive organization, serving Native and Latinx community members), Nch’l Wana Housing (culturally specific, serving Native community members), the Oregon Human Development Corporation (OHDC, culturally specific, serving the Latinx population), Bridges to Health and Hood River Shelter Services. The region’s ESG-CV2 application was the highest scoring application within the 26 county HUD Rural Continuum of Care and was prioritized for additional funding by Oregon Housing and Community Services.

In addition to the ESG collaborative, MCCAC also received \$1.5 million in funding from the Oregon Legislature (House Bill 5006) in 2021 for the development of a Navigation Center in The Dalles. The City of The Dalles further demonstrated its commitment to addressing homelessness in the region by committing \$500,000 in funding towards the development of the Navigation Center. This regional Navigation Center will provide non-congregate sheltering along with the co-located services of multiple providers. MCCAC will make the Navigation Center their future offices and co-located agencies will include Nch’l Wana Housing, the OHDC, One Community Health (the regional Federally Qualified Health Clinic), MCCFL, the Columbia Gorge Health Council/Bridges to Health, the Next Door Inc. and the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority.

It is also worth mentioning that MCCAC, in partnership with an affordable housing developer, has gained site control of a parcel of land in The Dalles and plans to develop approximately 75 Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) units. The project will include coordinated service provision from many of the above-mentioned providers and approximately 30 of these PSH units will be dedicated to serve formerly homeless Veterans.

The influx of the time limited resources above has allowed our scrappy, rural community to do some of its best work to date in addressing and/or mitigating the impacts of houselessness. In the past year we have more than doubled the number of emergency winter shelter beds serving the region from around 5,000 shelter bed nights in 2020-2021 to over 11,000 shelter bed nights for the winter of 2021-2022. Thanks to strong partnership with The City of The Dalles, MCCAC was able to develop the region’s first year-round shelter on city owned property. The City of The Dalles also helped with site infrastructure, including purchasing five of the 18 pallet shelter units, providing ten shelter beds on the site and installing water and sewer at the site allowing for the installation of a shower and restroom trailer that serves shelter clients.

In Hood River, Hood River Shelter Services collaborated with MCCAC, the City of Hood River and a private landowner to develop a 26-bed emergency winter shelter site with a use agreement extending from 2021-2025. As you can see, our region has significant momentum and the will to address houselessness that is rooted in equity and collaboration. We have been successful in

bringing in additional resources to better serve the community but as those resources come to an end, developing a sustainable model for our future will be critical. We strongly feel that House Bill 4123 can help us get there.

Again, I would like to urge your support of House Bill 4123 as we look to develop a strong, coordinated houseless service system that seeks to advance equity and ensure that our most vulnerable community members have the opportunity to live free from poverty and houselessness.

In service to our community,

Kenny LaPoint
MCCAC, Executive Director