

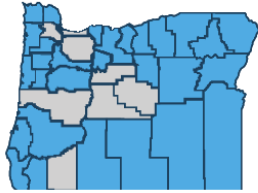
Rural Oregon Continuum Of Care

December 11, 2024

Good morning, Chair Marsh, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice Chair Gamba, and members of the Housing and Homelessness Committee. For the record, my name is Brooke Matthews, and I am the Program Manager for the Balance of State Continuum of Care, which represents 26 counties in Oregon. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on the work of the Sustainable Shelter Work Group.

I had the privilege of participating on the Sustainable Shelter Work Group and the “What We Fund” subgroup. The work that I perform regularly in my position requires me to speak with agencies and service providers from all points of the continuum, from those in outreach and emergency shelters to those helping achieve sustainable housing. When I first began this work several years ago, many of these agencies and organizations were siloed and communication and collaboration were at a minimum, impeding agency capacity and efficiency when delivering services. The Sustainable Shelter Work Group successfully brought together multiple agencies from various contact points along the continuum, allowing Community Action Agencies, shelter operators, housing authorities, culturally specific organizations, advocates and state and local government from every geographic region in the state to discuss the status of emergency shelters in Oregon. This level of collaboration is imperative when discussing a vast and distinct shelter system and I would like to recognize the effort put into convening this diverse group to address these challenges. Through this collaboration, we were able to discuss successful approaches across the state, as well as challenges that each shelter provider faces and identify ways to mitigate those obstacles. It is important to note that the approach for emergency shelter is very different in rural areas, where access to resources and a vast geography with minimal transportation inhibits the ability to access shelter and support services, and this work group was able to begin addressing some of those challenges.

While shelter definitions, data collection and funding guidelines were analyzed and evaluated with a great deal of success, it is important to note that the Emergency Shelter system is only one piece of the housing continuum. Emergency shelter saves lives by giving those experiencing unsheltered houselessness a place to shelter out of the elements, as well as a stable, albeit temporary, base where they can launch into seeking housing stability. Unfortunately, without the additional components of the continuum (transitional housing, housing assistance, affordable housing and housing stability including home ownership) a bottleneck is created within the system, where we can successfully shelter those who are unhoused, but do not have a pathway for them to achieve housing stability. Being able to gather a group this diverse to address the first step in the continuum is amazing, and the work



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that was accomplished will save lives. And it is important to remember that this is only the first step and that we must all continue this same level of diligence and collaboration when addressing the next steps in the continuum as well.

On behalf of the 26 counties I represent, I would like to thank you for your time and consideration towards solutions to help the most vulnerable members of our community.

Thank you,

Brooke L. Matthews