

SB 496 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Housing and Development

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 1/25

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Allows funding from the Emergency Housing Account to be used towards certain pet-related services of individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Appropriates \$6 million in one-time, General Fund moneys to be used for grants to qualified emergency or domestic violence shelters that provide support for individuals' pets, including food, shelter, supplies, and basic veterinary services. Requires grant recipients to submit reports of activities, costs, and effectiveness to the Housing and Community Services Department by August 1, 2024. Requires the department to provide report to interim committee of the Legislative Assembly by September 15, 2024.

Declares emergency, effective July 1, 2023.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Current statute directs the Housing and Community Services Department to administer the Emergency Housing Account (EHA), which assists low or very-low income persons who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Specific policies regarding the use of program funds are developed by the Oregon Housing Stability Council with the advice of organizations, housing and service providers, and government entities. Program grants may cover emergency shelters, transitional housing, in-home services, and emergency home-related payments.

The EHA does not currently cover pet-related expenses. Data are not widely tracked; the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) suggests roughly 10% of those experiencing homelessness own pets (NAEH, 2020), while other studies suggest the number reaches 25% (Rhoades et al, 2015). Few homeless services providers allow pets on the premises. Costs of pet ownership are currently the responsibility of the pet owner, with some nonprofit organizations providing assistance through donation funding and partnerships with animal welfare organizations.

Senate Bill 496 would allow EHA grants to cover pet assistance, including food, shelter, supplies, and basic veterinary services, for individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, allocate \$6 million in one-time funding for organizations providing these services, and require reporting to the legislature of organizations' program-related activity no later than September 15, 2024.