

Submitter: Tony Mendenhall
On Behalf Of: Safe Families for Children
Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness
Measure: HB2456

Chair Dexter, Co-Vice Chair Gamba, Co-Vice Chair Helfrich, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Oregon's children, youth, and young adults. As the Safe Families for Children Director for Hearts with a Mission in Josephine County, I am dedicated to the care and support of runaway and Homeless youth in my county. We provide all volunteer host homes, mentors and circles of support through our Safe Families for Children programming(0-22), shelter(10-17), Transitional Living Programs(18-22). I am writing you today to advocate for full funding for HB 2454 and HB 2456, to provide and ensure a full continuum of services for Oregon's unaccompanied houseless youth, those who are not in the physical custody of their parents or guardians, who are homeless and often without a caring adult in their lives.

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 houseless youth population.

HB 2454 and HB 2456 provide \$6.25 M to support host home providers across Oregon, a model with a strong national reputation, for which Oregon is a leader. Host Homes provide youth with long-term housing supports as well as a stable home, mentorship, and support system while they attend school. HB 2454 and HB 2456 also provide \$12.5 M to expand or enhance existing shelter facilities, outreach, culturally specific services, mental health/substance use services, and other transitional housing options for houseless youth.

These bills will also dedicate funding to providing assistance to school-aged youth and families to prevent evictions or rapidly rehouse them if they do become houseless.

Since 2009, Hearts With a mission has served over 2500 children and youth in the range of services we provide. During that time, we have utilized over 400 different host families to support homeless youth. Homes are an essential part of supporting these kids and we have learned that a home is not just a building but also the caring people inside that have the greatest impact on each youth.

In the United States, half of homeless adults first experienced houselessness 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 2454 and 2456 ensure that is a reality for our young Oregonians experiencing houselessness.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Tony L Mendenhall