



Date: January 31, 2023
To: House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Stable Housing for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness, HB 2456

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

My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 2456. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

Nationally, marginalized identities and communities are disproportionately represented among the homeless population; Black youth are 83% more likely to experience houselessness and LGBTQIA+ youth are 120% more likely to experience houselessness. Oregon ranks first in the country for youth houselessness. The number one indicator of adult houselessness is youth houselessness. In the United States, half of homeless adults first experienced houselessness in their youth. The Oregon Department of Education's presentation, "A Focus on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth," shared that "youth most at risk of adult homelessness are aging out of foster care when they turn 18, ages 18-25 with less than a high school diploma or GED, identify as LGBTQ, are parenting and unmarried, and are Hispanic or Black. The Oregon Shelter report for August 2019 states that the 2018 Point-in-Time Count found 317 youth under age 18 experienced homelessness, of which 70% were unsheltered and 992 youth ages 18-24 experienced homelessness, of which 60% were unsheltered. In 2018, HUD found Oregon to be 1 of the 5 top states in the rate of unsheltered, unaccompanied youth homelessness."¹ In the 2021-2022 school year, there were "18,358 youth experiencing houselessness"² identified by the Oregon Department of Education. Youth homelessness in Oregon rose 32% as a result of the 2008 recession. We certainly expect similar outcomes because of the economic downturn, as well as the impacts of the wildfires Oregon has experienced recently.

Providing services for unaccompanied houseless youth helps keep youth out of a lifetime of houselessness. HB 2456 will make changes that can further support youth experiencing homelessness, making resources and services more accessible for them. HB 2456 will modify the emergency housing assistance program and state homeless assistance program to provide services and assistance to school-aged children experiencing or at risk of homelessness. With HB 2456, eligibility requirements for applicants for grants from the homeless youth services enhancement program and host home project program will be modified. Host homes provide youth with long-term housing support as well as a stable home, mentorship, and support system while they attend school. We know that by providing services for this population, we can and will deter lifetimes of housing instability and homelessness. Every child and young adult deserve to have access to safe and stable support services that help them thrive.

¹ Oregon Department of Education, A Focus on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, 2022.

² Oregon Department of Education, Student Enrollment 2021-2022, 2022.



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I hope you will join me in affirming housing as a basic human right for all Oregonians, especially our youth. Please pass HB 2456 to ensure that we support our youth experiencing homelessness.

Respectfully,

Stephanie Phillips Bridges
Policy Analyst
Urban League of Portland
Portland, OR 97227
Phone: 503.740.2607
Fax: 503.281.2612