



10 February 2023

Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Owens, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, I write in support of House Bill 3125, which will establish the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund. My name is Jimmy Jones and I am the Executive Director of MWVCAA, where we serve low-income residents of Marion, Polk and 11 other counties across Oregon. Annually we provide more than \$70 million in services and direct client assistance for housing, homelessness, energy and weatherization, and early learning programs to more than 55,000 Oregonians in poverty.

Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency was chartered as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and became an independent non-profit in 1969. For the past 54 years we have provided anti-poverty, self-sufficiency and stabilization services to low-income residents of Marion, Polk, and beyond. We offer nine program areas in three divisions, Early Learning and Child Care, Housing and Homelessness, and Energy and Weatherization. Through the pandemic we provided emergency child care, and provided rental assistance totaling more than \$36 million to 5,000 Marion-Polk households. In 2021, through federal funding, our organization received \$1,531,150 to provide financial assistance for low-income families for their drinking water and wastewater bills. In a short amount of time, we have set up dozens of agreements with community water systems and wastewater systems in our community. As of today, we have assisted 1,450 households, inclusive of 4,396 Oregonians. Our average payment has been \$266, and 38 percent of the households are under 75 percent of the federal poverty level.

Affordable water is essential. Water and sewer bills can exceed monthly heating and electric costs. House Bill 3125 will build on the hard work undertaken to establish a program to distribute water and sewer bill payment assistance by investing state resources. It would use lessons learned from the federal program and expand access to Oregonians currently ineligible for assistance, including low-income Oregonians living in multi-family dwellings whose utilities are bundled with rent.

In closing, we would ask you to support House Bill 3125 and build on the success of the existing program, which has been providing an essential service to many low-income Oregonians. In our community, we are committed to helping prevent individuals from losing access to safe drinking water and wastewater.

Respectfully,

Jimmy Jones
Executive Director