

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 Chief Program Officer of Hearts With A Mission, I am dedicated to serving the needs of runaway, homeless and at-risk youth. I am writing to 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, and who are homeless.

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 considered a leader. Host Homes provide youth with long-term housing support 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.

HWAM has over 13 years' experience providing services to these vulnerable youth and families in our community. The need is greater than ever. It is of great importance that we invest in systems that will provide safe and stable housing, support for youth to stay in school and services that address the mental health and substance abuse crisis in families and communities.

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.

Sharon L. Rush, CPO
Hearts With A Mission