

March 2, 2023

Joint Subcommittee on Transportation & Economic Development  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301



*Where Life is Sweet*

Re: SB 5511, Appropriates moneys from General Fund to OHCS for biennial expenses

Testimony for Public Hearing on March 2, 2023

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of the Mayor and City Council, the City of Hermiston respectfully requests your support of SB 5511 be contingent upon the Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) Department's budget being required to directly, and annually, provide funding to each city in Oregon to address and prevent homelessness.

Oregon's homelessness crisis is unprecedented. If this humanitarian disaster is to be rapidly and proportionally addressed, the state must reconsider how funds are implemented and how resources can be directed to reach all Oregonians. The current system of competitive grants and new reliance on continuums of care is fragmented, inequitable, and ignores the front-line response work happening on the ground in cities today. When faced with a crisis of this magnitude, it is critical that the State support the work being done day-in-and-out, on the ground in cities. A direct and collaborative partnership between the state and its 241 cities is critical to Oregon's response.

Every corner of this state, every city in this state, has a resident who is either experiencing homelessness or is so unstably housed they are one emergency away from losing their home. The OHCS budget should reflect this painful reality and ensure that cities are provided direct funding to quickly deploy resources, in coordination with county and provider partners, to make meaningful advancements not just in addressing homelessness, but in preventing it as well.

The homeless crisis is impacting Hermiston. Unsheltered homelessness has not reached a crisis level in Hermiston. However, the city has approximately 100 residents who are unsheltered. Additionally, the Hermiston School District, in 2022-23, reported that 44 students are homeless or unstably housed. Recent state investments in affordable housing are appreciated but fall short of the city's needs. Hermiston needs more than 200 additional affordable housing units to prevent its residents from falling into homelessness. The City is also implementing a partnership funded by the HB4123 Pilot Program with the Cities of Umatilla, Stanfield, Echo and Umatilla County to develop transitional housing to assist unsheltered people in finding a path to housing

stabilization. As we continue to develop that partnership ongoing stable funding will be key to providing the best possible services to those experiencing homelessness.

Providing each city direct funding ensures two things. First, it allows for a more rapid deployment of solutions to address and prevent homelessness. Second, it ensures state resources are reaching Oregonians in all communities. Annual funding enables cities, in partnership with counties and providers, to effectively plan their community response, commit to specific outcomes, and clearly measure and communicate on local progress towards those outcomes. One-and-done funding is just not effective or realistic.

Cities are frontline workers in our state's homelessness crisis, As frontline workers, cities know where resources are lacking and where and how programs can be launched to provide the most efficient and direct impact to the Oregonians who are not being reached under the current approach of competitive grants and indirect funding.

The city of Hermiston strongly encourages the Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development to pass SB 5511, with an amendment that directly, and annually, allocates funding from OHCS to each city in Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Byron D. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Byron D. Smith  
City Manager