

Submitter: Michael Szporluk

On Behalf  
Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On  
Transportation and Economic Development

Measure: HB5019

7 March 2023

Senator Aaron Woods  
Representative David Gomberg  
Co-Chairs, Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Subcommittee On Transportation and Economic Development  
900 Court St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support if amended on HB 5019

Dear Co-Chairs Woods, Gomberg, and Members of the Committee:

Above all I appreciate the need to act to reduce the challenges our state faces with respect to the unhoused or homeless population. The Governor's two Executive Orders (23-02 and 23-03) make a compelling case that we are failing as a state to uphold our duty and support the realization of the right to adequate housing for Oregonians.

The Governor's case for acting is based on two foundations. First, at least four regions and Metro are experiencing a crisis given the significant increases in the homeless population between 2017 and 2022; and second, the norms we as a society have to uphold require us to ensure that all persons in Oregon can exercise their right to life, and their right to adequate housing, and that we as a society have to recognize their dignity and support their social and economic inclusion. The Governor cites the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing's 2019 report on homelessness as the basis for compelling us to take action.

The UN has long considered the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and the Governor is right to point out that "homelessness...is a prima facie violation of the right to housing."

The Governor notes that the 2022 Point in Time survey found that 18,000 persons were unhoused, notes that 62% of the homeless population are "unsheltered" and that Oregon has the highest rate in the country for families with children who are unsheltered.

It is important to drill down further to see who are the unhoused. The following statistics should inform your decision-making and approach:

- Persons with mental health disabilities constitute 30 percent of the homeless population. For Oregon, that means that roughly 5500 persons with mental health disabilities are unhoused.
- The sheltered homeless population is 2.5 times more likely to have a disability than the general population;
- People in families that are homeless experience twice the disability rate as the general population;
- Women have a higher risk of being homeless, and violence or the threat of violence is a serious issue that demands our attention. One study found that 60 percent of women who are homeless have experienced domestic violence. Women with disabilities are known to experience higher rates of violence than non-disabled women;
- People who are homeless tend to acquire disabilities as a result of being homeless.

[All citations – taken from UN Habitat (2015), the Right to Adequate Housing for Persons with Disabilities Living in Cities]

Any measures taken up as a result of adopting HB 5019 must factor in the challenges that persons with disabilities face when we (persons with disabilities) are homeless. While the Governor's Executive Orders are silent on the issue of protections for persons with disabilities, I implore you to ensure that the Oregon Department of Emergency Management and Oregon Housing and Community Services Department recognize the extent to which homelessness impacts the disability community. At a bare minimum these departments should be required to actively engage with members of the disability community at the design and implementation stages of their work.

Thank you for your consideration.

Michael Szporluk  
Principal

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