



Date: March 29, 2023
To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development
From: Jennifer Parrish Taylor, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Pathways to Empowerment, SB 918

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Parrish Taylor, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Public Policy with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 918. 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.

The Oregon Legislature must continue the work of HB 2100 by continuing historic investments that have helped to redress over 40 years of dominant culture led housing policies that have resulted in over-representation of white populations being served. Senate Bill 918 seeks to address the impact of those racial disparities. In 2021, House Bill 2100, directed OHCS to establish the Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities. We were tasked with four main goals: outline recommendations on how to decrease disparate rates of homelessness among people of color, improve efforts to understand the scope of services and supports needed for individuals experiencing homelessness and housing instability, change the current funding structure for homeless services statewide, and modifying contracting through a transparent process that builds on other state-level efforts to implement outcomes-based contracting and revise internal policies and systems. In January of 2022, the task force submitted its findings and recommendations to the Oregon legislature and just recently, we released a report on Implementation Pathways, which will continue the work into 2024 and 2025.

However, initial critical investments to scale up BIPOC agencies such as the Urban League, IRCO, and the Oregon Workers Relief coalition, have already been made by OHCS, investments that are currently at risk and need continued funding through SB 918. Through our Project Empowerment program, the Urban League will continue replicating and scaling up the success we've seen in our current programming of establishing a holistic coaching process that provides wraparound support to qualified re-entry participants. This model allows the direct service staff to help the participant quickly identify obstacles to housing stability and to support the participant in a more substantial, intensive way. Participants have responded favorably to this approach and are stabilizing and finding employment at higher and faster rates, staying more stable in their housing, and taking control of their health. This multifaceted approach and culturally specific integrated program model meet participants where they are at the point of engagement and supports client-led goal achievement. The program centers eviction prevention and long-term case management investments, that have proven to



help get families on the brink of homelessness, stable on their own through employment, addressing mental/behavioral health challenges, and education opportunities. We would argue that this is the best use of public dollars.

The Urban League is the only Black-focused culturally specific organization expanding statewide and building a culturally specific network of service providers with these dollars as a direct remedy to decades of Black Oregonians being underserved by existing Community Action Agencies network distributions. Additionally, \$8.3 million was invested just for the Urban League alone and tied to the work of House Bill 2100 and the work of the task force which has been ongoing and committed to each year (EHA, SHAP, admin funding, Community Action Agency operating dollars). The investment was on par or close to Community Action Agency funding; that is not indicative of a small pilot program that might evaporate leaving hundreds of households in danger of eviction. SB 918 is asking for \$35.6 million in total investments which would continue the work of the Urban League, IRCO, the Oregon Worker Relief Coalition, increased support for Community Action Agencies, in addition to establishing a Housing Justice Program that would focus on reducing disparities, especially racial disparities, among populations experiencing homelessness or housing instability across Oregon.

We are in a moment where how we address the housing crisis will either position our communities well for future successes or force unnecessary setbacks. SB 918 not only fits squarely into the Joint Committee on Ways and Means budget framework of protecting vital services, getting the most of every dollar, prioritizing investments in housing and homelessness, and plans for the future: it is the right thing to do. We must avoid recreating the problem the State is set out to address. Discontinuing these active programs will do just that. We urge your support of our continued work via a yes vote on Senate Bill 918.

Respectfully,

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