

University Relations

Post Office Box 751 503-725-4419 tel
Portland, Oregon 97207-0751 503-725-4499 fax

March 30, 2023

Representative Maxine Dexter, Chair
House Housing and Homelessness Committee
900 Court Street NE, HR F
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Dexter and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2879 with the -1 amendment. HB 2879-1 will provide much needed funding to an established agency program that supports low-income college students.

In 2020, Portland State University's (PSU) Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative found that 44.6% of students experienced housing insecurity and over 16% experienced homelessness. The pandemic exacerbated these conditions. Pell-eligible, first-generation, students of color and transfer students reported insecurity at higher rates. Unfortunately, most public support for housing is unavailable to full-time post-secondary students.

PSU was recently awarded a federal grant, championed by Congressman Blumenauer, as part of the FY 2023 Congressionally Directed Spending process. The \$750,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development will fund a Low Cost Student Housing Project designed to address housing insecurity among PSU students, by offering housing stipends to qualifying students in the next academic year. Another component of the project will be a Low-Income Student Housing Feasibility Study.

PSU is undertaking the feasibility study to better understand the capacity, impact and opportunity to expand low cost or no cost housing for PSU students. The scope will include an evaluation of potential new or expanded partnerships with non-profit organizations that provide or support low-income student housing. PSU will contract with consultants who will work in partnership with HRAC to conduct the feasibility study. The goal is to create a roadmap to best serve low income PSU students and our community as it relates to their housing needs.

The feasibility study will include three components:

1. *Barriers to PSU Student Housing Security*

HRAC will lead the first of the three components, examining barriers to housing security for PSU students and evaluating options for scaling existing programs or adopting alternative service models at PSU. The purpose is to identify student housing instability drivers and corresponding interventions to improve housing stability for PSU students, including an analysis of barriers for specific PSU student populations. This work will be foundational to the other two components of the feasibility study.

2. Market Research, Development Opportunity Analysis, and Feasibility Analysis

A consultant will be contracted to conduct a market research study, development opportunity analysis, and associated financial feasibility analysis. The low-income student housing market research report will determine how a potential new housing product (new building or property acquisition) would fit within the university's current housing portfolio, provide a summary of market-rate rental rates, affordable housing rental rates and general housing market trends within the Metro urban growth boundary, and provide a summary of transportation patterns and modality of PSU students. The development opportunity analysis report will assess opportunities and risks of new construction or acquisition of low-income housing for PSU students, including partnering with other postsecondary institutions and/or nonprofit organizations. Finally, a report on long-term financial feasibility of operating low-income student housing will be included as a corresponding report to the development opportunity analysis.

3. Policy Barriers and Opportunities Analysis

A second consultant will be contracted to study local, state and federal policy barriers and opportunities for PSU students seeking housing in the Portland metropolitan region. The result will identify low-income and affordable housing programs and services and their respective barriers to postsecondary students and provide recommendations to expand public housing support programs, if applicable, to post-secondary students.

Failure to meet the basic needs of students, including housing, profoundly impedes their ability to attain a degree. Expanding options for no cost or low-income student housing and reducing barriers to supportive services and affordable housing programs will have a positive impact on student retention and completion rates.

Ensuring housing security and advancing students across the post-secondary education finish line can have generational impacts both for future housing stability and participation in the workforce. HB 2879 with the -1 amendment is an important step in this direction. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Eric Noll
Project Manager, Office of University Relations
Portland State University