



Date: April 9th, 2023
To: Joint Ways and Means Roadshow
From: Jennifer Parrish Taylor, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Pathways to Empowerment, SB 918

Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and Members of the Committee,

For the record my name is Jennifer Parrish Taylor, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Public Policy at the Urban League of Portland. One of Oregon's oldest civil rights and community service agencies in Oregon. I am submitting this testimony to urge your support on SB 918 in the dash two amendments.

I submit this not only as a representative of the agency I serve my community in, but also as an HB2100 task force member and Chair, and as a representative of the League as one of the co-founders of Reimagine Oregon, a group that helped to bring this historic bill into the forefront of our state's efforts to wrestle with the ways in which oppression and racism have been systemically built into how we support our most vulnerable residents. This helpful context will provide a backdrop into the emergence of SB 918. HB 2100, which passed in the 2021 regular legislative session, was a bill designed to increase equal opportunity in contracting with Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS). Prior to its passage, Oregon Revised Statutes limited anti-poverty funding distributions solely to the Community Action Agency (CAA) network for the express purpose of ensuring geographic equity in disbursement. This meant that pretty much any funding related to anti-poverty measures – economic development, rent assistance, homelessness service resources, etc. were statutorily entitled and granted to community action agencies through no competitive process and with zero legislatively mandated outcomes related to service delivery or equity. Multiple attempts have been made over the last thirty years to address this legislative snag, but to no avail.

Due to disagreements and in recognition of ensuring we hold participants currently served harmless, the bill mandated a taskforce be established. The taskforce was charged with studying the disparities in homelessness and claims made by BIPOC advocates at the time, that the CAA distribution network was not producing equitable outcomes, was overserving white populations, and that this statutory limitation was contributing to inequitable access to homelessness services for BIPOC communities. The taskforce assembled, conducted the study, found what was claimed to be true and we were tasked with recommending a series of actions to the legislature about how to remedy this issue and change the EHA/SHAP funding structure. We produced a report of our findings in January of 2022 and a set of recommendations in March of 2023.

In the following report released in March 2023, it echoed some of these same recommendations but specifically mentions a targeted approach to “grow the pie” between now and the end of the 2023 - 2025 biennium, when a new EHA and SHAP funding structure is in place. These funding pots would use both a targeted universalist direct-non-competitive procurement process to immediately redress 40+ years of divestments AND competitive grant processes to build capacity for agencies not included in EHA/SHAP funding, as well as begin to target Oregonians left out of homeless services and/or who were not served/adequately served by CAAs.



Historic investments have produced incredible results. In the Governor's Recommended Budget, capacity building grants to culturally responsive organizations have been allotted \$7.5 million, about 2% of the total budget of \$377.6 million dollars that has been earmarked for homelessness emergency response efforts and ongoing costs. We appreciate the investments in culturally responsive organizations but let's be clear, Community Action Agencies are technically defined as "culturally responsive" organizations and would have access to this funding, further reducing the funds available to culturally specific organizations, which the League is one. It is important to have specificity when it comes to investing in Black and brown communities and though the intention is there in the Governor's budget, the specifics are not.¹

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. Through Project Empowerment, 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 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 agencies named in SB 918 are continuing investments used with this targeted universalist approach. Agencies include: the Urban League of Portland and networked partners (Coalition of Black Men, Soul Restoration Center, El Programa Hispano, etc.), Oregon Worker Relief Coalition (representing over 100 agencies across the state serving immigrant and refugee communities who have historically not accessed these services due to immigrant status and language barriers), and Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization. These agencies are directly serving and led by the communities facing disparities mentioned in the report.

Between the three agencies named here, these dollars collectively are connected to over 122 community-based nonprofit agencies throughout the state to accomplish HB2100 Taskforce Recommendations with direct non-competitive procurement processes similar to CAAs who are getting direct non-competitive procurement allocations this biennium (SB 5511, 2023 Regular Session) and are named in SB 918. These agencies serve:

- Black populations (who are represented at three times their share of the total state population in homelessness)
- Hispanic populations (who are represented at just under twice their share of the total state population in doubled up homelessness), and other immigrant and refugee populations
- And other immigrant and refugee populations, who are often completely excluded from some services offered through CAAs or continuums of care due to immigration status and lack of cultural competence and language/linguistic barriers

As recommended in the report, SB 918 also stands up the Oregon Housing Justice Program

¹ https://www.oregon.gov/das/financial/documents/2023-25_gb.pdf, Pg. 129.



that will award grants in a competitive grant process with OHCS and will help to continue this critical work of investing in communities who've not had access to EHA/SHAP funding over the past 40+ years.

This work is vital to continuing to wrestle with the ways in which Oregon has systemically oppressed Oregonians living at the intersection of race, homelessness, and poverty, and must be continued into the 2023/2025 biennium. The Taskforce will continue to meet to work with OHCS and develop a new funding mechanism for EHA/SHAP dollars. Because this work was funded in the 2021-2023 biennium, seeded with an emergency allocation given to OHCS in the 2021 second special session, dollars are already out the door serving culturally specific populations and if discontinued could result in the direct eviction and displacement of Black and Brown residents in Oregon. 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 – but it is the right thing to do. For these reasons and more we emphatically urge a yes vote on SB 918.

Respectfully,

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