

April 14, 2023
Public Hearing SB5506

To: 2023 Ways and Means Committee Road Show, Newport, Oregon

RE: Testimony of Catherine Biscoe, Philomath, Oregon on behalf of capitol request for the South Benton Resource Center and South Benton Food Pantry, Monroe, Oregon, Benton County

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward and Representative Tawna Sanchez, members of the 2023 Ways and Means Committee, Representative David Gomberg, District 10, and Senator Dick Anderson, District 5, for Monroe and Rural Benton County.

My name is Catherine Biscoe, a former Philomath City Councilor, 2021-22 President of the LOC Women's Caucus, representing women elected officials in all 241 Oregon cities, and 12-year volunteer for Philomath Community Services, a central Benton County resource organization and long-standing partner with South Benton Resource Center and South Benton Food Pantry.

I am testifying today on behalf of the capital funding requests for both the South Benton Resource Center and the South Benton Food Pantry in Monroe, Oregon, Benton County. These two growing resource centers provide essential social and food services to Monroe in Benton County, and surrounding rural communities in Linn and Lane County, including nearby cities of Harrisburg, Halsey, Alpine, Junction City, Alsea, and Philomath.

The South Benton Resource Center is requesting funding of \$142,000 to complete a current remodel of a recently acquired building, Heritage Hall, to improve and increase rural social services to the region. The community and private funders have invested approximately \$250,000 of funds into this effort to date, and expansion of services are dependent on the completion of this remodel.

The South Benton Food Pantry is requesting funding of \$155,000 for a complete rebuild of a food pantry facility for the Food Bank and Gleaner Programs that will include a 60x34 building, running water, bathrooms, an indoor client waiting room, a clean room to repack food, and food safe storage. This project is shovel ready with permitting in second phase, a building plan in hands and a contractor agreement, with \$125,000 of project funding already secured from private funders and the community.

My twelve years of volunteering with Philomath's social services programs allowed me to build a relationship with the South Benton Resource Center and the South Benton Food Pantry. These two programs, successfully address food insecurity, housing insecurity, basic emergency boxes, mail services for those unhoused, and additional needs of countless families and individuals. With the expansion from these funds, increasing program options such as food delivery and senior meals programs, a commercial kitchen, domestic violence survivor resources, mental health and youth programs, Alcoholics Anonymous and other community group meeting space, and Back-to-School supply programs will bring immeasurable added value to this region.

This center and food pantry, while located in Monroe, a community of less than 800, is known to serve a population of as many as 3000, and according to Monroe Mayor Dan Sheets, a greater rural service area as large as 7500. The nearest similar social services for this region are Corvallis, 18 miles

away and Eugene, at 23 miles, a significant distance barrier for those with limited resources, making Monroe an essential service hub for these community members.

Members of the 2023 Ways and Means Committee, I urge you to support the two capital funding requests of \$142,000 for the remodel completion of Heritage Hall (South Benton Resource Center) and the \$155,000 for the new building and facilities for the South Benton Food Pantry in Monroe, Oregon. I hope you will join our colleagues in elected and appointed services and prioritize investments for our cities vulnerable community members recognizing the importance and success of rural social service and food programs like the South Benton Resource Center and the South Benton Food Pantry.

Respectfully,

Catherine Biscoe

Former Philomath City Council

2021-22 President of the League of Oregon Cities Women's Caucus

2022 Director of League of Oregon Cities

2009-2020 Philomath Community Services volunteer