

February 15, 2024

Senator Fred Girod, Co-Chair
Representative Paul Holvey, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction
900 Court Street NE
Salem OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Girod and Holvey and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to voice my support for the funding of the United Way of the Mid-Willamette Valley Cottages United Project. The project, aimed at seniors, 55 and up, will bring 25 low-income cottages to the Salem-Keizer area. These cottages will have a maximum monthly rent of \$500.00, meet building, energy and ADA standards, serve to revitalize the neighborhood where they are located, and have the potential to be replicated in our city, county and state.

For seniors, affordable housing is a critical need in Salem/Keizer:

- According to the 2023 PIT count, Salem had 1488 homeless individuals. Of that, 429 were age 50 and over. This was the largest group in this count.
- 63% of older adults, 55 and up, have an earned income below \$35,000 a year.
- In the past 30 years, the number of people 55 and older experiencing homelessness has jumped from 11% to 50%.
- In 2023 the average social security benefit was \$1782 per month.
- The average rent in Salem is between \$1100-\$1400 per month.
- For older adults, financial insecurity is a barrier to stable housing and house instability significantly impacts health.

The need for affordable housing for seniors is one part of a bigger approach to addressing homelessness in our state.

UWMWV has made a commitment to serving our community needs. One of these is the need for more low barrier shelter space.

At Inside Out, The Refuge warming center, we regularly see individuals would benefit from this project.

I respectfully request that you approve funding for the United Way of the Mid-Willamette Cottages United project. This funding will create a real-world solution to our senior homelessness issue and create a long-term replicable project.

Sincerely,

Milton M Bliss
Head Elder, Inside Out