



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 write in my capacity as Executive Director of CASA of Marion County to voice my support for the funding of the Greater Woodburn Opportunity Center. The project will bring 50 low-income housing units to the City of Woodburn, as well as wrap-around services for its residents and the surrounding community. These services will be delivered through the Integrated Services Delivery Model, which amplifies community assets and reduces barriers to support, while simultaneously supporting residents in affordable housing units.

Both housing and services are critical for the greater Woodburn area:

- 13.7% of residents live in poverty.
- Children under age 5 comprise 6.9% of the population, compared to 5.4% statewide.
- 57% of Woodburn's population identify as Hispanic, compared to 13.4% statewide.
- 54% of Woodburn residents speak a language other than English in their home, compared to 15% statewide.

Though the need in Woodburn is high, the opportunity to empower and transform the lives is even higher; this is why I support the Greater Woodburn Opportunity Center. The addition of a community center would create a space for CASA (which is based in Keizer) to serve with Woodburn children and families, and recruit and train bilingual and bicultural Court Appointed Special Advocates.

CASA of Marion County serves all children in foster care, including children from Woodburn. There is a connection between affordable housing and foster care. Inadequate housing is the fourth top reason for placement in foster care, behind neglect, caregiver's drug use, and domestic violence. See DHS Data Book (2022). Homelessness is the tenth top reason for placement in foster care. *Id.* Inadequate housing is a barrier to reunification. A lack of access to housing may preclude parents from welcoming their children back into their lives. For all these reasons, I respectfully request that you approve funding for the Greater Woodburn Opportunity Center.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Nordyke

Vanessa Nordyke, JD
Executive Director, CASA of Marion County