

Thank you Senator Pham and committee members for the honor of speaking with you today. My name is Andrea Myhre, I am the executive director of Corvallis Housing First, a position I have held for the past 8 and a half years. Our organization, founded in 2008, serves people who are experiencing homelessness. We have 40 units of supportive housing, primarily serving people who have experienced chronic homelessness who would have a hard time finding housing in the local housing market. We also provide housing-focused case management services in partnership with local sheltering and outreach organizations. We have a growing caseload of clients who we have helped to house who need ongoing support services to stay stable in housing. We serve between 200-250 people annually in the Corvallis area. We are a small organization, but are an important part of the social safety net in our community.

In these times, we are grateful to be operating in a state that prioritizes serving our most vulnerable citizens. We have been following federal changes to SNAP benefits, Medicaid, and HUD policies and funding to the best of our ability, through monitoring the state's website, and through alerts from the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Since the new administration came into office, we have fielded a lot of questions from our clients, who are very fearful of the effects these changes will have on them, and it's been tough to know what to say because things are constantly shifting due to the complicated nature of politics right now and pending lawsuits. While major effects haven't been felt yet, here are a couple of examples of what is happening so far, gleaned from our case managers;

- There have seemed to be dramatic cuts to SNAP for people who currently receive SSDI. The average SSDI payment our clients get is somewhere around \$900 a month, some clients report their SNAP being cut in half to around \$160 a month. Given that groceries are increasingly expensive, this has necessitated us to start a program to supplement clients food sources by coordinating with food banks and gleaners for weekly food box deliveries. This has been great, but people are getting way less of the basics, like eggs and milk, and the strain on local resources considerable.
- We have seen way fewer Section 8/Housing Choice vouchers released by our local housing authority, which has created a bottleneck in our work to move people from emergency shelter and transitional housing programs to permanent housing. We see people spending longer times in shelters and transitional programs, which in turn, limits spaces for people who are on the street.
- Housing supports provided through Oregon's Medicaid waiver have helped many people stay in housing. However, we already see cracks in this system as cuts to funding loom.

From my perspective as director, the 180 degree direction change HUD has made from prioritizing housing-first oriented permanent supportive housing to transitional housing with mandatory treatment has been head spinning. Luckily, lawsuits filed by national advocacy groups have been successful in helping us keep our grants for now, but they may only be staving off inevitable policy changes. To be clear, we are not against treatment-focused programs. We need all types of options for people experiencing homelessness. But they can't be the only option, and we can't suddenly change our mission or pivot as fast as what's needed to meet the requirements of these grants.

My biggest concern is if the planned cuts and restrictions to Section 8 and other housing vouchers actually happen, we will see mass chaos and an exponential increase in homelessness. Also at the top of the list is trying to keep up with the cascading effect of new restrictions and program cuts. We can help clients through some of the new requirements, but I worry about our capacity to keep up.

As a small organization that continues to provide supportive housing from a housing-first perspective, we want you to stay the course. The choice to establish a statewide sheltering system was timely as federal funding for sheltering is restricted and focused elsewhere. Continuing to support and grow affordable housing, specifically Permanent Supportive Housing projects, is key to ensuring those who are most vulnerable get and stay housed, especially as HUD has lost interest in this concept. Using medicaid funds to support the idea that housing is health is also key, but programs need to be coordinated with homelessness efforts, and carefully designed to not set people up for failure. Making sure we address food security for all is also essential, and supporting our awesome food banks and gleaner programs is important. Also, we can't tackle the most intensive needs without intervention from government. That being said, we need our state government agencies to provide residential treatment options for those with substance use disorders and severe mental health diagnoses. Peer support programs and supportive housing simply cannot address all the needs of our clients. And we need to allow for more creative housing solutions, both short- and long-term, and be practical with how we apply regulations. For example, for the past 5 years, we have been planning the construction of the first supportive housing site in our community and were recently delayed by more than a year due to an environmental review and mitigation process. We ultimately came to a positive resolution, but it almost cost us the whole project.

Also, given the chaos in the federal programs, we can't take major shifts in policies and programs at the state level right now. We can manage funding cuts to some degree, but having unstable programs and policies at the state level would push us to the point of falling apart.

Another note, it's too much for us to keep up with all the policy changes and lawsuits. We are doing the on-the-ground work. We appreciate being able to refer to the state website about how federal cuts affect our clients, but even more guidance will be needed in how to respond to the changes, and asking about our experiences and feedback is important.

Again, I want to thank you for the work you have done. Keep it up though it will be hard! We are ready for it, we need to know you all are ready for it as well.