

Submitter: Bethany Darnell

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3644

House Housing and Homelessness Committee Members,

As a concerned citizen and advocate for people experiencing homelessness, I urge you to give HB 3644 your full support to help maintain the critical shelter system in Lane County. Our community has one of the highest per-capita rates of homelessness in the country – averaging more than 3,500 people experiencing homelessness in a city of 178,000 people with only about 1,000 shelter spaces available. That leaves approximately 2,400 people sleeping in doorways, in parks, under highway overpasses, and along the river in places not fit for human habitation every night in our community.

Our community is working to create real, lasting solutions. In response to this crisis, local organizations, service providers, and advocates have collaborated to expand and diversify shelter options to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness. These shelters range from group drop-in shelters to vehicle sites, indoor spaces with individual tents, and "village-style" models. These sites remain in high demand, filled to capacity with long waitlists, demonstrating both their necessity and success in providing stable environments where individuals can find safety, support, and pathways to permanent housing.

One organization that has been instrumental in addressing homelessness is Community Supported Shelters. Their innovative and humane approach to transitional shelter has helped countless individuals find stability and access essential services. However, despite historic state investments in shelters over the past two years, around 250 innovative and effective shelter spaces in Eugene, including those operated by Community Supported Shelters, do not qualify for the state support necessary to keep them open. The Sustainable Shelter Workgroup's recommendation for the Safe Temporary Emergency Placement (STEP) program, included within HB 3644, would address this gap by allowing vehicle and alternative sites to become eligible for state funding.

Our community has stepped up to respond to the homelessness crisis, leveraging one-time local, state, and federal funds to create a network of shelters in collaboration with social service providers. These shelters were developed with input from service providers and people with lived experience to ensure they meet the diverse needs of those seeking shelter. We need the state's continued partnership and leadership to sustain and expand these efforts.

We have made tremendous progress, but more support is needed to prevent people from being pushed back onto the streets. Please give HB 3644 your full support to ensure that safe, stable, and effective shelter options, including those provided by Community Supported Shelters, remain available for those who need them most.

Sincerely,
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