



February 24, 2025

Chair Marsh
House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Andersen and Breese-Iverson, and members of the Committee:

It's a pleasure to join you today and to provide testify in support of House Bill 3644, the statewide shelter framework.

My testimony on HB 3644 represents the City of Eugene's needs and also offers insight to the needs of other Oregon cities responding to the crisis of unsheltered homelessness.

Thank you to Governor Kotek and Representative Marsh for initiating the Sustainable Shelter Workgroup, which my predecessor, Mayor Lucy Vinis, participated in. As some of you know, I am a licensed architect and have been working in the realm of housing production and homelessness policy for several years.

Eugene 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 just under 180,000 people, with only about 1,000 shelter spaces available. These sites consistently operate at capacity with substantial waiting lists.

While the braided housing and homelessness crisis is a national challenge driven by systemic and structural patterns, in our region, the City of Eugene has stepped up to pilot solutions that bring us closer to long-term stability. Locally, we have invested one-time local, state and federal funds in mitigating the harms of unsheltered homelessness through a unique, collaborative network of shelters working with social service providers.

And with support from state and federal partners, other cities across the state have stepped up to mitigate the crisis of homelessness. Cities are the places where most Oregonians can see the value of cross-jurisdictional effectiveness most clearly. Cities are the places to demonstrate strategic, place-based work toward concrete solutions.

In support of those goals, Eugene has been able to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of a diverse range of shelter strategies, including group drop-in shelters, vehicle sites, indoor space with individual tents, and "village style" models.

All these shelter sites are in high demand and integrated with the broader poverty reduction, behavioral health, and housing efforts of our local partners at Lane County. In the southern Willamette Valley, we have excellent HMIS data—a leader in Oregon, but also arguably the best in the nation—and Eugene is motivated to see positive change. Significant progress is possible when funds are available. We've seen great results with our local efforts and All-In funding. Ensuring the durability that local progress is now our focus.

City-supported shelters were developed with the input of both service providers and people with lived experience to provide places where people can recover safely from the stresses and risks of living on the street. They provide safe, healthy, and supported locations for people to stabilize and access a network of Continuum of Care services. Over the past few years, outcomes for our shelter system have improved, with more people transitioning into housing and other more stable living situations, and fewer returning to unsheltered homelessness. While this progress is encouraging, we have more work to do—specifically to serve our residents who identify as LGBTQ+, communities of color, youth, and survivors of domestic violence.

This need and trajectory of progress is also why sustainable shelter funding is so important. Though we have seen historic leadership and state investments over the past few years, about half of Eugene's 450 City-supported shelter spaces do not currently qualify for state funds, including the City's innovative and successful vehicle and alternative shelter sites. To rectify this situation, the Shelter Workgroup's recommendation for the Safe Temporary Emergency Placement sites, or STEP program, that is included within HB 3644.

This will allow hundreds of shelter beds statewide to be eligible for state funding.

Additionally, Governor Kotek's recommended shelter investment of \$217M is included within the bill, an investment that is critical to the continued operation of Eugene's currently eligible shelters, a circumstance that is true for many cities. I want to thank Governor Kotek for her continued leadership and for the inclusion of shelter funds within her budget and I also want to recognize the Legislature's work in creating a budget that addresses many goals. With that in mind, I am also advocating to increase these investments to support the newly eligible STEP shelters and expand the number of shelter beds statewide. This will help Oregon close the challenging gap between needed beds and available beds.

The work of this session is building on several years of leadership to strategically address our state's housing and homelessness crisis. HB 3644 represents a collaborative and comprehensive approach for state and local governments in partnership with service providers. HB 3644 clarifies roles of various stakeholders, places into state law a framework that provides consistency and equity across the state, and it makes the necessary investments to stabilize the existing shelter program statewide. This is key to our continued progress.

I greatly appreciate the clarity HB 3644 provides with regards to how local governments, service providers, and regional stakeholders will coordinate and partner with the Regional Coordinating Entities. The direction within HB 3644 supports regional intergovernmental and service provider relationships and cooperation. We have capable local partners, and HB 3644 reinforces the efforts of effective, local teams working to deliver meaningful outcomes on the ground.

Thank you for the opportunity to join you today and offer my commitment to our shared success in this challenging and critical work.

I ask, on behalf of the City of Eugene and my fellow mayors statewide, that you give HB 3644 your full support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kaarin Knudson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mayor Kaarin Knudson
City of Eugene