

Submitter: kayl bourgault
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today not only as a passionate advocate for homeless youth but as someone who has lived the experience of being homeless. At the age of 15, I found myself fleeing physical and emotional abuse from my parents with nowhere else to turn. I became homeless because my survival depended on it—there was no other choice. The devastating reality of that time was that there were no shelters, no day services, and no community support for youth like me.

In my experience, youth facing homelessness often find themselves alone, cold, and hungry, with no resources to turn to. I remember vividly the feeling of being 15, freezing, starving, and watching as adults walked by without a second glance. I remember how it felt to be ignored—no one stopped to offer even a dollar for a meal or a jacket to keep warm. The apathy from the community was staggering, and in my youth, it shattered my belief in humanity for years to come.

Today, I am proud to be a part of the work being done by PEER Shelter, an organization that provides life-saving services for youth aged 16-24 experiencing homelessness in Lane County. Through PEER Shelter, I've seen firsthand the impact that a supportive, caring environment can have on a young person who has known nothing but survival. It's a critical lifeline for those of us who were once in that same situation.

As someone who works directly with homeless youth through Station 7, and through PLAY (Pondering Life and Advocating for Youth), a youth action council group I run within Looking Glass Community Services, I see the positive changes these services foster every day. Most of the youth who participate in PLAY are directly connected to PEER Shelter. These young people show up every month, eager to advocate for a better future—one where they can offer support and care for those who will come after them. They are learning to advocate for themselves and to take responsibility for creating a community where no one is left behind.

However, without adequate funding, PEER Shelter faces the very real risk of shutting its doors. This is not an abstract concern—this is life or death for the youth we support. PEER Shelter reaches full capacity daily and, since July 2024, has had 547 guests turned away due to the high demand for shelter beds for youth and young adults in Lane County.

The consequences of losing PEER Shelter are far-reaching. These services are not just important—they are essential. They help youth heal from trauma, break the cycle of homelessness, and develop the resilience they need to build better futures for themselves. When we lose these services, we risk condemning more young people to the same fate I faced: a life of isolation, pain, and despair.

That's why I urge the Joint Ways & Means Committee to allocate funding from the Oregon General Fund to support shelter services and BHRN-related work. These services are vital, not only for the youth we serve today but for the generations of young people who will need these same supports in the future.

We have an opportunity here to show our youth that they are valued, that their lives matter, and that we are willing to step up to help them succeed. Please do not let this critical service disappear. The lives of our most vulnerable young people depend on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kayl Bourgault
Youth Services Coordinator
Station 7 Shelter/ PLAY Action Council
Looking Glass Community Services