

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

My name is Nick Elias. I am a pioneer employee of the PEER Shelter in Eugene OR. When I interviewed for the position of NOC PEER counselor, it was my dream job. I have since become the NOC supervisor and it is still my dream job. We currently house up to 24 homeless youth aged 16-24. When we first opened in October of 2023, we housed 9. We thought it was going to be slow to start, but on the first night, I believe, we had 6 and by the second night, we had all 9 beds filled. That first night, while doing checks to make sure our clients were doing okay, I noticed how these young people were sleeping comfortably on their beds. Some were bundled up like they were still cold and on the street, others were sprawled out on their beds and snoring contentedly. ALL were looking comfortable and relaxed. I remember thinking "People on the street don't sleep like that." Now, almost exactly 1 1/2 years later, when I do checks to make sure our clients are okay, I still think "Wow, people on the street don't sleep like that." The names and faces have changed, as have the issues and things they need help with, but in 18 short months we have helped so many young people get the things they need. I'm sure other testimonies will tell the specifics of how many clients we've had and how many have been housed or helped in some other way. But that's not what I want to talk about.

I want to talk about the sheer joy of being a safe person. I have had clients tell me that they have never felt as safe as they do at PEER. I have heard clients tell me or other staff that we are heroes. I've received notes from clients telling me that they sleep better at night because they know I'm there to keep them safe. It is for these reasons that I ask that this bill be passed, and PEER shelter get the rest of the funding it didn't get from M110. Don't let me and my fellow staff members be the only heroes in this scenario. This state has a reputation for helping the homeless. Some see that as a bad thing. I don't. As a devout Christian I feel that it is my duty to help those in need, and in so many cases, PEER's clients are some of the neediest I've encountered. My wife and I fostered through DHS for many years, and our specialty was at-risk teens. We would have loved to be able to open up a shelter like this. Being a part of PEER has been one of the highlights of my life. Please, consider the homeless youth of Eugene Oregon when you consider this bill. They need us. They need you to be a hero.