

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

I am writing in strong support of Policy Option Packages 504 and 505, the Homelessness Prevention Package in the Oregon Housing and Community Services Agency Budget. These POPs will allocate \$173.2 million to ensure continuity of emergency rent assistance and community-based and culturally specific services designed to prioritize prevention of eviction and homelessness in communities across the state.

As a disabled mother of two children I have often felt the fear of losing access to housing due to lack of funds. I've spent sleepless nights looking everywhere for support only to find that we were on our own. There's so little support as it is that is essential for this bill to be passed. This funding is the line between life and death for so many Oregonians.

Oregon renters are the 5th most cost burdened in the nation, and our eviction crisis is growing with more than 27,000 cases filed last year. Approximately 88% of evictions are because tenants cannot afford Oregon's high rents. As housing costs rise, more families are being pushed into crisis. Oregon families are on the brink, and we must act now with real solutions.

The threat of homelessness is greatest for our most vulnerable neighbors: families with children, domestic violence survivors, and seniors. Elderly Oregonians are now the fastest-growing group losing their homes, and Oregon has the highest rate of youth homelessness in the nation. Eviction, displacement and homelessness have lifelong implications for health, education, and economic opportunities.

Solving our homelessness crisis is deeply challenging, but it is not impossible. There are evidence-based prevention solutions already in place to keep thousands of families, seniors, and hard-working Oregonians out of homelessness. Connecting people to eviction protection and homelessness prevention services such as navigation services and legal assistance is a proven approach to ensure people can stay housed. When we can prevent evictions, we can turn off the pipeline into homelessness.

Preventing eviction is 5–10 times cheaper than letting someone fall into homelessness and trying to rehouse them later. Beyond cost, prevention also avoids trauma, job loss, school disruption, and health risks that come with homelessness.

We urge you to prioritize the critical and proven safety net continued by POPS 504 and 505. Please invest \$173.2 million to continue homelessness prevention and eviction intervention services and legal assistance, which are making a difference for thousands of Oregonians and stemming the tide of homelessness in our communities.

Our lawmakers must act now to protect our communities, support our providers, and ensure every Oregonian has a stable framework to build their future.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Oregon communities.

Sincerely,

River Scholl