

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

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ashley Kirkhart, and I am employed at Looking Glass Community Services, a long-standing nonprofit in Lane County that provides critical housing, behavioral health, and education services to vulnerable youth and families in our community. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of the emergency funding proposed in HB 5006, including resources that would sustain life-saving shelter programs like PEER Shelter in Lane County.

I was born and raised in Lane County. Growing up, I lived with a parent struggling with substance use disorder, which led to unmet basic needs, food insecurity, and I lived in a place not meant for habitation. When I was 13 years old, I found safety at Station 7, an emergency shelter operated by Looking Glass Community Services in Eugene, OR. At Station 7, I was met with kindness, access to food, a hot shower, and support from caring adults—an experience that holds great significance for me. At 16, I returned to Station 7. This time, I did not reunite with my guardian because I was expecting my first child and knew I needed to create a stable, supportive environment for my growing family. At 17, I was selected for a Lane County housing program, where a required budgeting class helped me build early momentum toward success. This support allowed me to complete my education and live independently with my child.

Today, I speak to you as the Director of Homeless Youth Services for Looking Glass. In the United States, half of all unhoused adults first experienced homelessness as youth. We know that by investing in services for this population that we can and will deter a lifetime of housing instability and homelessness. PEER Shelter is a 24-bed, low-barrier emergency shelter that serves youth ages 16–24 and their children. Many of the individuals we serve have experienced significant trauma, homelessness, and systemic barriers to stability. At PEER Shelter, we provide more than a place to sleep, we offer safety, dignity, and a foundation from which youth can begin to build self-sufficient futures. Since opening in 2023, PEER Shelter has been a vital part of the Behavioral Health Resource Network (BHRN) in Lane County, funded through Measure 110. In only 16 months, we have supported 366 unduplicated young people, their young children, and their pets, with not only shelter, but also access to peer counseling, case management, substance use treatment, mental health treatment, medical care, supported employment, benefits enrollment, parenting supports, and connectivity to housing. In March 2025 alone the PEER Shelter had 14 guests transitioned into housing programs. The PEER Shelter is at its full capacity of 24

youth every night with even more youth wanting to enter our care. Unfortunately, with the reduced M110 funding, the shelter's capacity will be reduced to 13 youth come July 1st, 2025. Without immediate emergency investment, we risk turning away a minimum of 11 youth each night with no safe place to go and worse, losing the progress we've made in helping them transition out of homelessness and into stability. HB 5006 offers a vital opportunity to prevent that outcome. By allocating emergency resources now, we can ensure Oregon's youth have access to safe shelter, basic needs, and the support necessary to heal and thrive.

At Looking Glass, we believe every young person deserves the chance to feel safe, supported, and capable of building a better future. I thank you for your service and your attention to this urgent matter, and I respectfully urge your support of HB 5006.