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Oregon's Unsheltered Houseless Emergency Is a Humanitarian Crisis That Needs State Support

Unsheltered houselessness, people living outside, is a humanitarian crisis in Oregon.

Every Oregon mayor in every city knows the need for public services is often greater than available funds can provide. Breathing new life into our communities' social and economic recovery is a top priority for each of us as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

We hear concerns from our constituents daily. They are deeply troubled that so many community members are living outside in dangerous and unsanitary conditions. They are frustrated at the pace of assistance and improvement within their communities. They are demanding a change – a change that compassionately balances the needs of houseless community members, while also allowing public spaces to be accessible. Cities across Oregon are stretching their resources as best they can, but it is not enough.

Our cities are innovating new responses to houselessness, recognizing that the challenge is multi-faceted and requires strong partnerships with counties, with private service providers, and with the business community. We are creating new year-round shelters, emergency camping areas, day centers, site clean-up and sanitation, increased outreach, and counseling services, and creating a balanced approach with enforcement of our community's laws and regulations. The cost of these services is staggering, and we need additional state resources to amplify our work.

But make no mistake: city budgets do not come close to addressing this problem. Yet, the human tragedy of too many Oregonians in crisis, living outside, often in unsanitary and dangerous situations, is a major concern for everyone.

Unsheltered houseless Oregonians cannot afford to wait another year. Oregon's communities cannot wait another year for another session of the state legislature. The crisis is acute, and our local efforts are not meeting the increasing demand. It is time for the state to build upon our efforts through an intentional investment this session.

We are asking our legislature to take a meaningful step in the right direction by supporting a \$50M in direct investment to cities to develop and operate safe temporary shelters, provide needed services to the unhoused community, and keep our communities clean. We recognize the need for assistance across the state, that is why the \$50M request includes grant funding for smaller communities and we support HB 4123 which will create new city/county homeless coordination responses in Benton, Coos, Deschutes, Lincoln, Hood River, Sherman, Wasco, Polk, Tillamook, and Umatilla counties.

This investment is desperately needed now, and most Oregonians support immediate action. A recent statewide public opinion poll, conducted by DMH Research, showed that after concerns about the rising cost of living, houselessness was the highest issue of concern *statewide*.

Our communities cannot wait. We urge this legislature to join us in addressing the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in our communities by acting now to help the cities of Oregon get our houseless neighbors the shelter, support services, and sanitary conditions they need immediately, then into housing.

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