
To: Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing

From: Peggy Samolinski, Director of the Youth and Family Services Division

Date: March 18, 2019

RE: Support for House Bill 2802

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of House Bill 2802, which establishes the Home Repair and Rehabilitation Fund within the Housing and Community Services Department and provides funding to low income households for repair and rehabilitation of homes.

The Youth and Family Services Division of the Multnomah County Department of County Human Services is the Community Action Agency for Multnomah County. Like other Community Action agencies across the state, we administer a federally-funded low income weatherization program that serves over 2200 households statewide and over 300 in Multnomah County every year.

In Multnomah County, over half of our low income households are energy burdened in that they can spend from 20-50% of their income on energy, leading to tough choices between food, medicine or heat. By comparison, the average household spends approximately 4% of their income on home energy. In the rural southeastern parts of the state, over 70% of low income households are energy burdened.

Weatherization programs work to reduce energy costs by approximately 40% for low income households including seniors, people with disabilities and families with children. These programs also improve liveability and keep people in their homes, allowing them to age in place and stay out of more costly homeless service and Medicaid systems. This in turn reduces potential trauma, improves health outcomes, and prolongs lives.

The improvement in air quality as a result of weatherization reduces asthma in children, which increases school attendance. Children of color are disproportionately impacted by poor air quality and childhood asthma.

Energy efficient homes are also more environmentally sustainable and reduce greenhouse gases. Cost per household is \$10,000 to \$20,000, and some examples of updates are installing energy efficient insulation, furnaces, appliances, windows, ventilation and other related items in the home. This bill would provide more flexible state funds to Community Action Agencies that would be used in conjunction with federal weatherization funds.

Federal Medicaid funds can also cover some home modifications to help people with disabilities age in place. Multnomah County Department of County Human Services can fund disability modifications using Medicaid. However, those funds do not cover normal wear and tear, dry rot, lead paint or asbestos abatement. If a person needs a bathroom remodel to

accommodate a wheelchair, many of the costly steps in a remodel that are not currently covered, could be covered with these flexible funds.

In Multnomah County we use flexible local funds together with more restrictive federal funds to perform repairs that can't be made with our federal funds. For example, we may not be able to weatherize a home without replacing the roof -- and roof replacement is not an allowable cost. Sometimes we have local funds for this purpose, and sometimes we have to turn down the project. The funds in this bill would allow us to repair, weatherize and modify more homes and turn down fewer households.

Other, more rural communities, are even more constrained than we are in terms of access to flexible, local funds. Many of our repairs and upgrades are to manufactured dwellings, which are also more prevalent in rural communities.

Multnomah County Health Department, as the Local Public Health Authority, also supports this bill's establishment of the Healthy Homes Program within the Housing and Community Services Department. Low-income individuals and families face greater housing instability and more adverse health outcomes, like asthma and chronic allergies, due to unsafe and unhealthy conditions encountered in substandard housing. The Healthy Homes Program provides critical health and safety funding to residences that have previously been excluded from the benefits of housing programs. This bill substantially addresses housing stability by expanding access to repairs and health and safety improvements in low-income housing across the state.

Thank you for your interest in these life-saving programs that reduce expenses, keep people housed, allow people to age in place, and improve health outcomes for some of our most vulnerable Oregonians.

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[Here is a link to a video of our weatherization work.](#)