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Media Release

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Rural Oregon service providers decry funding cut to Children and Youth Emergency Housing Assistance (YEHA)

The Children and Youth Emergency Housing Assistance (YEHA) program is crucial to families with children and youth experiencing or at risk of becoming homeless in rural Oregon. These areas are severely under-served with hundreds of homeless families and thousands more at risk. YEHA provides flexible funding that allows community organizations to address the unique needs of families in their area.

Oregon has historically had the highest rate of youth homelessness in the country. Thanks to innovative programs like YEHA our situation has improved, but devastating cuts to Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) threaten to reverse that progress.

Currently, five organizations receive money through YEHA: Maslow Project in Josephine County, FARA4Kids in Douglas County, Integral Youth Services in Klamath County, Housing Authority of Lincoln County, and Coos County Housing Authority. Grantees provide services like rent assistance, transportation and moving expenses.

In his testimony in support of the program, Craig Schuhmann, executive director of Integral Youth Services in Klamath County, wrote, “The YEHA grant has facilitated a new county-wide initiative to collaborate with community partners to prevent and eliminate homelessness for McKinney-Vento families. ... Without continued support for these critical funding streams, we would face the risk of severely reducing or even eliminating these essential services for our youth and young adults, many of whom are already experiencing unstable living situations or homelessness.”

Youth Emergency Housing Assistance has helped FARA4Kids open a new youth shelter in Roseburg called Dome Spe (Latin for Homes of Hope). The facility will include full crisis services: food pantry, clothing and hygiene closet, as well as supplies for both the housed and unhoused. FARA is also

developing a host home program, as well as a direct cash transfer program. Their hope is that a multi-pronged approach will help reduce youth homelessness in Douglas County by 80 percent by 2035, according to FARA grant writer Sam Temple in his testimony to the Oregon Legislature in support of the program.

The Maslow Project in Josephine County uses YEHA money to help vulnerable families like Sarah's, who testified that she was living in an unconverted school bus with her eight-year-old child, while pregnant with twins. The Maslow Project used YEHA money to help Sarah and her children cover an emergency motel stay and later helped them find a safe apartment. Sarah testified in support of the program, describing the help she received as her "first real chance at building something to support my family and escape poverty, so that ideally I won't always need government funding to survive."

Community organizations in other counties, such as Storyline Community in Clackamas, have hoped to expand YEHA into their areas. In response to possible cuts to the program, Anna Hoesly from Storyline writes:

Oregon is first in the nation for homeless families with children. The drastic cuts to prevention funding will be devastating on top of this—we are effectively creating a pipeline to homelessness for low-income working families. We receive calls weekly from our school system—a family with small children with no choice to sleep in their car in a school parking lot, a teenager with a terminally ill single mother at the brink of eviction. Again and again, we hear the same thing from the County: There is no assistance available. YEHA funding is a low-cost solution that targets resources where they're needed most to keep our families housed. We cannot afford to cut these funds. It is a moral and political imperative that we draw the line and say, 'We house our children.'

If the Legislature fails to renew the YEHA program, groups that receive money through the program will expend their funding by spring 2026. The YEHA grantees call for a minimum of \$3.2 million, so they can continue operations for the next biennium. The Oregon Legislature is not only set to eliminate the YEHA program but also cut emergency rent assistance by 80 percent. Eliminating YEHA may cause thousands of young people to lose their housing and may eventually lead to even higher levels of adult homelessness. Given our cost-of-living crisis, cutting aid to struggling families could be devastating to rural Oregon.

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