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Written Testimony for the Record

Curry County Board of Commissioners

Subject: Practical, Proven Solutions to Homelessness

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony following the Brookings Harbor Town Hall. I appreciate the County's willingness to continue this conversation in a solutions-oriented way.

I serve as the Executive Director of the North Bend City/Coos-Curry Housing Authorities and have been directly involved in designing, implementing, and supporting homelessness response systems across multiple Oregon communities, including Jackson County, Grants Pass, Medford, Redmond, Roseburg, and others. I have also worked with communities in Northern California and Eastern Oregon. My testimony reflects what has worked and what has not based on lived experience and implementation.

Addressing the Trash and Business Impact: From Complaint to Opportunity

Many communities first experience homelessness as a visible issue through trash accumulation, public health concerns, and impacts to local businesses and neighborhoods. In several communities, including Jackson County, this was addressed directly through Clean Sweep style employment and job training programs.

These programs directly addressed trash and environmental concerns, created paid work opportunities for people experiencing homelessness, built job skills and routine, improved relationships between businesses and unhoused individuals, and shifted the dynamic from conflict to cooperation.

Local businesses were engaged through service contracts to clean around their buildings, with the program later expanding to include landscaping and other maintenance services. The program also coordinated with law enforcement during encampment cleanups while outreach teams and livability officers worked in parallel to transition individuals into managed spaces that had been created.

This approach turned a persistent complaint into a hand up rather than a handout and benefited businesses, neighborhoods, and participants alike.

The Importance of a Managed Site With a Controlled Front Door

One of the most critical missing pieces in many communities is a managed waitlisted site with a clear operational plan.

Key elements of a successful managed site include a single overseeing organization responsible for operations, a waitlist-based intake with no open outreach or unmanaged entry, guests entering through referral and program participation, beds turning over as people move into housing so the next person on the list can enter, and the site serving people already engaged in stabilization and services rather than functioning as a permanent endpoint.

This model controls the front door, reduces chaos, and allows staff to focus on outcomes rather than constant crisis response.

Operations Matter More Than Location

In Medford, we routinely hosted tours for visiting cities and officials. A consistent observation from visitors was that they could not identify where shelter or village sites were located without being told.

This was not accidental.

Strong operational planning including staffing, rules, services, and neighborhood interface makes all the difference. When done correctly, sites are quiet and orderly, neighborhood disruption is minimized, and most importantly lives are stabilized and saved.

The goal must always be to save lives while minimizing community disruption.

Homelessness Is a Continuum Problem Not a Single Point Problem

Homelessness cannot be solved by addressing only one segment of the system. Communities must build the entire continuum at the same time, including managed emergency spaces, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, affordable and subsidized rental housing, and market rate housing.

When any part of this continuum is missing, flow breaks down both in the housing market and within homelessness response systems. People get stuck, services bottleneck, and emergency responses become permanent by default.

Workforce development and education must be integrated across the entire continuum from shelter to market rate housing. Stabilization, employment, and housing must move together.

Ordinances Alone Do Not Solve Homelessness

Enforcement only approaches and repeated ordinances do not resolve homelessness. They often result in displacement rather than solutions and push people from one jurisdiction to another.

Along the South Coast, this dynamic is already visible. Local city ordinances restricting where people can exist have contributed to the Brookings Harbor area housing a disproportionate number of unhoused neighbors. This is not because the Harbor is uniquely attractive but because it has become one of the few places where people are not immediately displaced.

This is an example of how enforcement without alternatives does not eliminate homelessness. It relocates it. When one community tightens restrictions without creating managed space or pathways forward, the impacts surface in adjacent areas.

Without solutions, ordinances create churn, not resolution.

Supportive Services Must Be the Heart of Any Managed Site

Supportive services are the secret sauce of homeless services. A managed site must be built around supportive services rather than containment.

The goal is not to warehouse people. The goal is to address the barriers that brought them to the site, including health, mental health, income, age, disability, and housing access, so they can transition to more permanent forms of housing.

Stabilization happens when people are safe, supported, and given time and structure to move forward.

Addressing the Myth of Migration

A common concern raised in many communities is the belief that creating services or managed spaces will cause large scale migration. Our experience across the South Coast does not support this narrative.

The majority of unhoused individuals visible in coastal communities are members of those very communities. They did not move to the South Coast to be homeless. Many were previously housed locally and after life events such as job loss, health crises, aging, mental illness, disability, addiction, grief, or family disruption (the list can go on forever) found themselves without stable housing. Loss is the leading cause of homelessness.

When Jackson County expanded shelter capacity to over 500 beds, we did not see mass migration. Communities like Grants Pass still had their own unhoused residents and eventually requested assistance, leading to the creation of Foundry Village. I assisted that community in developing ordinances that allowed that village to be built.

While some movement does occur, the reality is that many chronically unhoused individuals are seniors, medically fragile, living with disabilities, and not physically able to relocate long distances.

Notably, seniors are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.

A helpful way to understand this is to think of homelessness like a person who has fallen into a well. We may wonder how they got there. They could have tripped, jumped, or been pushed. Regardless of how it happened, they still need help getting out of the well.

Focusing on how someone became homeless instead of how to help them recover does not resolve the problem. Solutions must be grounded in compassion, structure, and pathways forward.

Collaboration Across Organizations and Jurisdictions Is Essential

None of the solutions described above were implemented by a single organization or jurisdiction acting alone.

In every community where progress was made, success required coordination across multiple partners, including cities and counties, housing authorities, service providers, faith-based organizations, behavioral health partners, and workforce and education systems.

Jurisdictional boundaries do not stop homelessness and solutions cannot stop there either. Alignment around shared goals, clear roles, and coordinated operations was essential to success and the same will be true in Curry County.

No single entity can or should carry this work alone. Durable solutions require shared ownership, shared responsibility, and consistent coordination across the region.

Closing

Homelessness is both an emergency and a systems failure that has developed over decades. We did not arrive at this point overnight, and we will not resolve it overnight. Addressing homelessness requires protecting immediate safety while simultaneously building upstream housing and workforce solutions.

The housing continuum can be thought of like a conveyor belt. Right now, that belt is stuck. When people cannot move forward into housing, employment, or stability, pressure builds at every point in the system. Recalibrating the system to restore flow is essential.

Managed spaces, strong operations, supportive services, and a full housing continuum are proven tools. Ordinances and enforcement alone are not.

Progress depends on regional coordination and shared responsibility. Curry County has the opportunity to build something thoughtful, effective, and durable if partners move forward together.

I appreciate the County's willingness to engage in this discussion and stand ready to continue contributing to solution focused workgroups as this effort moves forward.

Respectfully submitted,



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