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Testimony to **Portland City Council** on the **Shelter to Housing Continuum Project**, **Recommended Draft**

As a member of the Greater Portland Community and a consistent volunteer with people experiencing homelessness, this Project concerns me greatly. I have spent countless hours with individuals who are homeless, and the common trend I have noticed as the primary cause of homelessness in Portland is mental health. The majority of individuals experiencing homelessness in Portland is due to a mental health crisis of some kind. To simply pass a bill to allow more homeless housing, denies the very cause of the homelessness itself which is mental health. If we do not get to the root of this issue we will continue to put a Band-Aid on a much bigger wound. Many homeless individuals I have spoken with actually do not want housing due to the rules that come along with it. If an individual is welcomed into a shelter they're asked to abide by the rules which are present there. So if I am an individual struggling with drug abuse I am no longer allowed to stay there. This is why it is easier for me to stay on the streets than to go get help because there's nowhere to go that will accept me as I am. What our friends experiencing homelessness do not need are more shelters. They need friends to walk alongside them and help them through depression, anxiety, and struggles with drug abuse. These are things that another government program for shelter cannot provide. As we walk through our city streets and take note of all the trash that is overflowing by every single homeless camp we have to ask ourselves, have all of our efforts in the past helped this problem? We have passed many laws and bills to expand housing for these friends of ours, yet the horrible conditions they live in persist. In fact, I would argue they have gotten worse. Our friends experiencing homelessness do not need another program to expand shelter they need support; mental support, physical support, and spiritual support. They need to know there's a way out. They need counseling from childhood trauma. They need treatment for drug abuse. They need deep life-giving friendships. So I ask you, please do not continue to put a Band-Aid on a wound that is bleeding out and deeply need stitches.

Testimony is presented without formatting.