

**Testimony in support of overnight sleeping options**  
**Portland City Council**  
**December 21, 2011**

Commissioners Leonard, Fish and Saltzman, my name is David Leslie, and I am the executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) located at 0245 SW Bancroft, Suite B, Portland, Oregon. EMO is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations and ecumenical organizations working together to improve the lives of all Oregonians through interreligious dialogue and relationship building, advocacy and community ministry and service. Our community ministry programs are focused on addressing root causes of poverty and the impact of poverty on both individuals and communities.

Of particular concern to many of our members is the growing number of individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless throughout the state including the Portland metropolitan area. While there is much need, we are fortunate to live in a region where numerous religious congregations and faith-based social ministries open their doors to those who are homeless. The services provided include hospitality, spiritual support, meals, cash assistance, shelter, referral and other outreach efforts that help address immediate needs and move people from hopelessness into new life possibilities. Many faith communities collaborate with public agencies and community-based non-profit organizations ensuring a greater impact by serving together than working alone. Additionally, many religious leaders are also engaged in multi-sector planning and visioning efforts to develop new strategies and program resources to meet the growing needs in the region.

It is in this vein that we are pleased to add our support to the resolution before Council that would allow and monitor on a pilot project basis overnight sleeping options hosted on a voluntary basis by congregations or non-profits on their properties for people who are homeless, including families with children living in their vehicles, campers or trailers. There are similar projects that have been successfully implemented in numerous communities throughout the country including in Eugene, Oregon, which was also supported by EMO.

The resolution before you will allow support of faith communities in the City of Portland to utilize their property, including parking lots and buildings, in new and expanded ways to positively address the needs of those who are homeless. By offering a safe and secure site for overnight sleeping—complete with access to restrooms, temporary storage space, possibly showers and other services—those who discover the congregation's hospitality will have more stability in their lives and be in a better position to begin the move from being homelessness into permanent housing. Additionally, congregations who become hosts will develop important relationships with people who are homeless, whereby enhancing the faith community's understanding of the complex aspects of homelessness. Long-term, our hope is that through these encounters, more faith communities will support the development of more permanent housing and be active partners in providing additional resources that will reduce the level of homelessness in our community. Toward these ends, EMO is ready and willing to co-sponsor training and education forums to ensure successful implementation of the pilot project and to enhance faith-based participation in programs and initiatives to serve those people who are homeless and seeking long-term, affordable permanent housing.

During this season of thanksgiving and the anticipation of possibilities in the New Year, I want to thank Commissioner Fish for his leadership on issues related to homelessness and housing and for his commitment to this resolution. I also want to thank the entire Portland City Council for your support of developing collaborative partnerships with all sectors in the community to improve the livability for all our residents, especially those on the economic and social margins. It is in this spirit on behalf of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon that I urge your support of this important resolution.