

December 9, 2020 - By Electronic Mail

Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Chair
Ted Wheeler, Mayor of Portland

Re: A Living Wage for our Workers in FY 2021-22 Budget

Chair Kafoury and Mayor Wheeler:

We write to you on behalf of over 3,00 staff members who come to work daily at our organizations to ensure that our community is safe and supported. Our workforce supports residents in our homeless shelters through cold evenings, ensures students and their families receive needed support to succeed in school, provides cultural specific services that advance racial equity for our BIPOC families, helps our houseless neighbors move from the streets to housing, and intervenes when domestic violence threatens survivors with homelessness or even worse outcomes. Our teams make sure that that our Oregon values that prioritize basic human dignity and more equitably-distributed opportunity are made real through a broad range of human service programs funded by Bureaus and Departments of the City of Portland and Multnomah County. As we have shared with you before (see attached letter), too many members of our workforce – the people who support residents in our affordable housing, provide shelter and housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness, support families and students in our SUN schools, ensure more equitable access to career-track employment - do not earn a living wage. And our data tells us clearly that the economic burden of low wage work in human services falls disproportionately on our staff who identify as Black, Indigenous or as other Persons of Color.

As you each begin the public budgeting process that will determine FY 22 Budgets for Human Services programs supported by contracts with the City of Portland and Multnomah County, we implore you to incorporate into your budget direction guidance that will meaningfully advance our shared vision that essential workers providing critical community-based human services be paid a living wage.

For the next fiscal year, we request that you develop budgets that can provide – at a minimum - a two-fold resource increase for all renewing services contracts as follows:

- A meaningful cost of living adjustment (COLA) that applies to all expense categories in service contracts that aligns to standard measures of regional cost inflation; AND
- A compensation escalator of at least 5% that would apply to renewing staffing expenses in all Human Services contracts.

Combined, these budgetary adjustments will enable our organizations to make compensation adjustments that begin to move our minimum wages – currently averaging below \$15/hr across our sector - a small step closer toward a living wage for our region, which is closer to \$23/hr.

While we understand that COVID-19 will place resource constraints on public sector budgets and that you are both grappling with how to maintain critical levels of service and expand programming that targets the needs of our most vulnerable amidst revenue contraction, we cannot ignore for one more year the basic needs of the workforce that will provide those critical community services. Workers at our organizations should not struggle to pay their own rent and utilities while they work to ensure that other members of our community do not face the same fate.

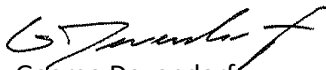
Provider Letter to Chair Kafoury and Mayor Wheeler
Equitable Compensation in Human Services
December 9, 2020

Despite COVID's negative impact on revenues and expansion of the economic need within our community – especially within local Communities of Color, we see hope and possibility as new resources arrive as a result of ballot measures that will provide expanded funding for Homeless Services, Early Childhood Education and Drug and Alcohol Treatment. Many of our organizations worked hard for the passage of these measures because we see each day the need to increase services levels in these sectors. But before we apply new resources to increase service levels, we must ensure that our model for service provision is equitable – including our model for compensating the essential workers who have continued to provide critical services during the pandemic. Public engagement on the Local Implementation Plan for Multnomah County under the Metro Homeless Services Measure called for these very investments in a sustainable, equitably-compensated human services workforce, as has Reimagine Oregon. We cannot grow our infrastructure of human services while we ignore the basic economic needs of the workforce we need to provide these services, especially when we know the majority of our front-line workforce is Black and Brown. We cannot “talk” of racial equity without “walking” it in the development of our budgets for public services.


We know a living wage for our sector will require a long-term effort and appreciate that you have each committed to work over the next several years to ensure that every member of the workforce that helps maintain our community safety net earns a fair living wage – one that will not require them to seek the support of the very safety net they make possible. While we partner with you going forward toward our shared goal, we must see real progress along the way. Next year's budget is the right time to strongly message to the people working to end homelessness and poverty in our community that we will not leave them vulnerable to the very conditions they were hired to address.

Thank you,

Sincerely,



George Devendorf
Executive Director
Transition Projects



Nkenge Harmon Johnson
President and CEO
Urban League of Portland



Andy Miller.
Executive Director
Human Solutions



Laura Golino de Lovato,
Executive Director
Northwest Pilot Project



Katrina Holland,
Executive Director
JOIN



Dennis Morrow,
Executive Director
Janus Youth Programs



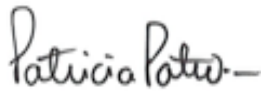
Sadie Feibel
Deputy Director of Programs
Latino Network

Paul Lumley

Paul Lumley,
Executive Director
Native American Youth and
Family Center



Andy Nelson,
Executive Director
Impact NW



Patricia Patron,
Executive Director
Outside In



Lee Po Cha,
Executive Director
Immigrant and Refugee
Community Organization
(IRCO)



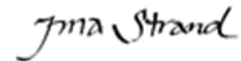
Emmy Ritter,
Executive Director
Raphael House of Portland



Kaia Sand,
Executive Director
Street Roots



Rachel Solotaroff,
President and CEO
Central City Concern



Judy Strand
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New Avenues for Youth



Brandi Tuck,
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