

# Facing a new opportunity for affordable housing

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**BY MATT KINSHELLA**  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Those who envision an Oregon where every person has opportunity that comes with a safe, decent, affordable home are fortunate to live in 2015. The moment is pregnant with opportunity. Every day, more and more conversations are popping up about homelessness and affordable homes. There's an energy you can feel waiting to be directed.

It is true that the steps we have taken to get out of the recession have benefited some — but not all.

Tens of thousands of Oregonians experienced homelessness last year — 20,000 of whom were kids; 3,797 were K-12 students in Multnomah County, 1,207 in Clackamas County and 2,001 in Washington County.

We have relied too heavily on the market and not put in place strong policies and resources that would prevent many thousands of Oregonians from spending sleepless nights wondering how they will afford rent.

But emerging from the shadows of suffering is the sentiment that we're in this together.

Communities clamoring for housing have sparked, among other things, a request from Gov. Kitzhaber for \$100 million in bonds to be deployed in 2017 and subsequent years to provide housing opportunities for families and children with very low incomes.

This is much needed, and we have no doubt that it will make a huge difference in many of our communities. But two years is a long time to wait for shelter.

Many compassionate and pragmatic people are asking: What can we do about homelessness now?

An answer: Increase funding for the Emergency Housing Account (EHA) and State Homeless Assistance Program (SHAP). EHA provides short-term

assistance to prevent and end homelessness, and SHAP is used to provide emergency shelter. These funds are flexible tools that give Oregonians the freedom they need.

Oregon families are tough, resilient and driven. When provided an opportunity, we are able to get back on our feet.

A few hundred dollars for rent can help someone leave an abusive partner. Quickly alleviating some of the economic burden of starting over allows a parent to help children cope with the trauma and process the change, or begin a healing process themselves.

A safe, affordable home sets a child up for wellness that lasts through adulthood. In a stable home, babies are born healthier, the risk for asthma lessens, children are a healthier weight, injuries are fewer, mental health is more stable, and kids can be active with less threat of injury or physical impairments.

Children in stable homes learn and achieve more in school. Home helps level the playing field. Stable homes are better for increased attention and reduce stress that gets in the way of learning, leaving families with more resources to put into childhood enrichment.

In 2015 the Legislature can ensure \$20 million goes to EHA and SHAP so that mothers and fathers, kids and teachers, servers and customers can remain in stable homes that are foundational to our state's success.

EHA and SHAP dollars are distributed to every Oregon county to help fill the gaps that community agencies and volunteers cannot meet. They provide emergency rent assistance, help with rental deposits or application fees, and emergency shelter.

Our decisions can allow people to contribute to the prosperity of our state. By removing obstacles to success, we can clear paths that allow access to resources and

opportunities so we all can participate meaningfully in our economy.

But as Robert Kennedy said: "It is not enough to understand, or to see clearly. The future will be shaped in the arena of human activity, by those willing to commit their minds and their bodies to the task."

Last year at this time, more than 60 advocates braved harsh conditions to attend the Oregon Housing Alliance Housing Opportunity Day. Reports of heavy snowfall and piled-up freeways didn't deter advocates from standing up for Oregonians who needed emergency rent assistance.

And their work paid off. An estimated additional 1,300 families or households received the money needed to prevent or end homelessness.

With demand still extremely high we have a chance to stop playing catch-up and start making a dent in the state's homelessness rates.

On March 11, hundreds will gather in the Oregon Capitol for Housing Opportunity Day. They'll speak with one message: Everyone deserves a safe, decent, affordable place to call home. They'll stand next to a mountain of 20,000 pairs of socks acknowledging the number of students who experienced homelessness last year.

When all Oregonians are free to tap into their deep well of ingenuity, we all are better off. Homes provide everyone, especially children, with an opportunity to succeed. To prevent and end homelessness for Oregonians, we need additional resources. The Legislature has an opportunity to make an immediate improvement in housing opportunity in every part of Oregon by adding funding for EHA and SHAP this year.

*The Housing Alliance is hosting a Housing Opportunity Day on March 11 at the state capitol in Salem. Join us, and be part of the 20,000 pairs of socks drive. Learn more at [OregonHousingAlliance.org](http://OregonHousingAlliance.org) or on Facebook.*

## Spring

by William Adams

Spring to me is about new beginnings,  
About after the winter slumber.  
Everything is waking up,  
People are out and about, happy, and so am I, like them  
Enjoying this nice warm sunny day,  
Taking advantage of it while I've got it.  
For me it is a new beginning.  
New spot I hope to claim  
I had no idea it was like this.  
People here are so friendly,  
Even the baristas know me by name.  
Yes this is what I like.  
Enjoying the sun, the sales,  
The friendly new customers who just wanna shake hands  
I can't complain about anything right away, and, if it rains,  
That's what the poncho is for.



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