

Title: Vlad Yurlov, Policy Analyst at Cascade Policy Institute, testified against funding ineffective homeless services

Chair Kafoury and Commissioners,

Over the last year, the Joint Office of Homeless Services has used \$33 million to rent and provide services to roughly 400 motel rooms over eight facilities. This draft budget recommends spending \$15 million to extend the program for **another** six months. Here are some questions the council should answer before adopting this budget decision.

### **Why isn't the motel program already winding down?**

The summary for [the motel program clearly states](#) that its purpose was to help homeless residents “remain isolated until a vaccine and/or effective treatments are widely available.” **Shots have been available for months and everyone over the age of 16 can already get them.**

Each of the 400 beds cost roughly \$2 thousand per month to rent. **Even the most high-end apartments in Portland wouldn't dare charge that much for a room and a bed.**

The other \$5 thousand per monthly room is made up of physical and behavioral health services. But even \$5 million for services wouldn't make a difference, because they're largely voluntary.

### **What have voluntary support services achieved?**

This Housing First, treatment later, approach was the backbone of your 10-year plan to “end” homelessness by 2015. **It failed us then and it is still failing our people now.** There are many problems that may cause someone to lose their home in the first place: addiction issues, physical disabilities, mental health conditions, and low skills are common examples. But voluntary services simply move the suffering indoors instead of offering treatment regimens that actively help people overcome them.

Before the motel program began, City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty warned that spending tens of millions of dollars on motel housing would be a “fundamentally wrong” response if we “have nothing at the end of it.” Therefore, my final question is,

### **What do we have at the end of this program?**

Hundreds of people have been left to their own devices in overpriced rooms no more ready to earn their own living than when they came in. **Extending the motel program for another 6 months is admitting that this program either didn't have enough funding or didn't intend to give these people the skills to go out on their own.** And at \$7 thousand per room per month, I just don't see how more money solves anything. This was an opportunity to actively help people overcome their mental and physical burdens and learn to prosper, but you didn't make that the program's mission.

**It's time to renounce the Housing First approach for good.** Focus the proposed \$15 million and whatever else you can find into mental, physical, and behavioral treatment regimens that are tied to housing. Furthermore, start funding job programs that allow people to learn skills and live independently.

These questions should be answered publicly before thinking about extending the motel program.