



May 22, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Honorable Kate Brown  
Governor of Oregon  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: A Request for Partial Mobilization of the Oregon National Guard

Governor Brown:

I hereby request consideration of a partial mobilization of the Oregon National Guard to combat the impacts of homelessness in our state. After studying this issue over the past three years I am convinced the major problem facing the increasingly robust homelessness-to-self-sufficiency efforts is the absence of a statewide strategic vision. Though we have made progress defining the problem and increased various capacities improving outcomes, we do not have a statewide “force-enabling” instrument required for programming sustainability.

As you know, there are currently thousands of homeless families and individuals living within our communities. According to available data, many of these people are identified as in “transitional status,” some are in “cyclical status,” and a few are likely best understood as navigating a “chronic status” of homelessness. This represents a clear, present, and growing danger to the fabric of our state. In simplest terms, homelessness is a threat to Oregon – a threat that we continue to ignore or approach incrementally – at our peril.

As Governor you have the legal authority to mobilize the Oregon National Guard for domestic emergencies. In the past we have done this for floods, fires, and natural disasters. Right now, you have the most mobilization-ready militia in US History: the modern National Guard has become an operational reserve. Our citizen airmen/soldiers have relative experience that could prove invaluable in our efforts to contain homelessness. The National Guard has built facilities overseas. Over the years we have benefitted from tailoring “summer training” exercises for high priority infrastructure and community assistance. With appropriate planning we can leverage these capacities in support of a statewide strategy.

I propose the following: partial mobilization of relevant National Guard units with volunteer augmentation of troops with key experiences in construction, logistics, and other necessary skillsets. This mobilization would support targeted construction of multiple-purpose structures at publicly-owned “hubs” in communities throughout the state. These hubs would be collaboratively designated by state, county, city, and associated non-profit support organizations; built to serve both the immediate need of safe and secure temporary housing for transitional homeless populations as well as for future emergency management/disaster response uses; and these facilities would be “paired” with service-support agreements for wrap-around requirements necessary for successful transition.

Within twelve months we should be able to make a measurable impact upon transitional homelessness. Once the initial phase has begun it would be possible to craft a second phase of development: collaboratively determined “tiny house” parks that could be built by a number of partner organizations including the Oregon Department of Corrections, emergent K-12 career and technical programs, and interested non-profits. This supplemental effort would likely benefit from lessons learned during the first stage as well as provide necessary support for education, employment, health care, and transportation access and capabilities development.

In conclusion, I ask you to consider leveraging the tremendous capacities offered by the Oregon National Guard members seeking to make a difference at home. At your direction we could employ our citizen airmen/soldiers in an effort that would demonstrate the enduring impact of a community united – it could be a transformative program yielding significant improvement in homeless-to-self-sufficiency as well as increased statewide resiliency. If done well, this strategy might even spark a new chapter in civic engagement throughout our state with benefits too widespread to measure.

Respectfully,

Paul L. Evans  
State Representative

CC:

State Treasurer Ted Wheeler  
President of the Senate Peter Courtney  
Speaker of the House Tina Kotek  
The Adjutant General MG Mike Steencl