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Homelessness destroys our youths, and we need to find a cure.

During the 2006-07 school year, the Oregon Department of Education counted thousands of homeless students. And the 2007 one-night shelter count found more than 4,000 homeless youths throughout the state.

Most come from homeless families — moms and their children — but then there are the homeless youths without families, often runaways with a history of abuse and neglect. These problems need to be answered with much more, but success begins with a stable roof over their heads.

Many homeless kids go to school, to be sure. But they're behind. Only 23 percent of homeless students meet the 10th-grade math benchmark in Oregon, compared to the statewide average of 55 percent. That's a prescription for dropping out.

We can stop this pathology. We can get these young Oregonians off the streets and into school. We can stabilize their families. We can do it by moving away from the quick and convenient fix (such as overnight shelters) to the long-term solution: permanent supportive housing. It works. Portland and Seattle have shown the way.

The action plan is called "A Home for Hope," and it asks community officials across our state to play a lead role. We know it is tough for jurisdictions to meet the costs and demands of permanent supportive housing, but in the long run, it is cheaper.

It diverts homeless persons from the costly cycle of hospital emergency rooms and criminal-justice intake. It keeps homeless kids in school. It gives homeless families a pathway out of the addiction, abuse and poverty that all too often torment them.

You may not know any homeless families, but we do. We meet them in the state offices that provide social services. We see them in emergency rooms. And we know them from the damning data that tell us: Oregon, you can do better.

We join in support of "A Home for Hope" for every youth and call on Oregonians to help. We ask that you support local efforts for permanent housing, housing that offers services leading to family stability, especially important for our youths.

In the end, the issue of homelessness affects us all, either directly or indirectly, and the solution to this problem lies with us all, as well.

Our families are the foundation of our communities, and if we want to thrive as a state, we must work together to see that every Oregon child has a roof over his or her head and the opportunity to learn and achieve full potential.

It is not only the right thing to do by our state, it is the right thing to do by our children.

*Ted Kulongoski is Oregon's governor. To e-mail the governor, click on the "contact" link on his Web site at [governor.oregon.gov](http://governor.oregon.gov). Victor Merced is director of the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department. He can be reached at [victor.merced@state.or.us](mailto:victor.merced@state.or.us).*

Link

For a link to the report "A Home for Hope," click:

[http://www.ehac.oregon.gov/OHCS/EHAC/docs/EHAC\\_Action\\_Plan\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ehac.oregon.gov/OHCS/EHAC/docs/EHAC_Action_Plan_Final.pdf)