



CCB# 154965

ROGUE VALLEY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

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The Honorable Representative Jennifer Williamson, Chair
House Judiciary Committee

February 25, 2019

Dear Chair Williamson and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Rogue Valley Habitat for Humanity, located in Medford, Oregon. The mission of our organization is to provide decent, simple and affordable housing to low income people in need. We typically build or renovate homes in partnership with the selected applicant and community partners. Our organization has built and sold 64 homes in Jackson County, providing stable housing to nearly 300 people, changing lives forever.

I have been seeking innovative ways to increase the amount of housing our organization can provide in Southern Oregon. I have been working extensively with the planning department of the City of Medford in regards to the receivership program. This program has the potential to increase the number of homes that can be utilized for affordable housing as well as decreasing the number of abandoned homes and neighborhoods in blight. The focus on zombie homes has been statewide, as these homes are a detriment to the community. They become dangerous, drug infested, with an increase of rodent infestation, fire hazards and decrease the property value of neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, Oregon's Receivership Program hasn't proved workable for cities or counties. As currently written, the statute mandates that a city or county may engage a nonprofit, Housing Authority or one of its own departments, appointing them as a Receiver to improve the home. After the nuisance property has been brought back up to a livable standard, the statute then dictates that the home must go to the highest bidder on the auction block.

While the Receiver will be repaid their hard costs plus up to 15% out of the auction sale, neither nonprofits nor Housing Authorities are in the business of ensuring maximum gain for the owners of zombie homes. HB 2285 gives cities and counties a workable tool to address the most egregious zombie homes by placing a lien on the home for the estimated cost of bringing it up to a livable standard. Any interested party has 60 days prior to this lien being placed to begin addressing needed repairs. If no action is taken, the municipality can foreclose on the lien and then, if they choose to do so, donate it to a nonprofit or Housing Authority to add a much-needed livable home to the market, improve neighborhood property values and contribute to a healthy and attractive community.

I urge you to please consider supporting HB 2285 which will provide nonprofit organizations and Housing Authorities with another tool for providing much needed affordable housing. In Southern Oregon, the need for housing is at a crisis level with few solutions available. People are desperate for housing, while homes sit in conditions of blight and neglect.

Sincerely,

Denise James

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