

March 14, 2019

Re: House Bill 2055

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer and Human Services and Housing Committee:

Please accept this letter as encouragement to pass Oregon House Bill 2055 to establish a workforce accelerator program within the Housing and Community Services Department.

With about 4,200 caregivers in Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties, St. Charles Health System is the largest employer in the region. Housing For All, a cross-sector regional housing consortium formed to help address affordability and other housing needs in Central Oregon, recently completed a Regional Housing Needs Assessment that highlights the need for workforce housing in all Central Oregon communities, especially Bend.

The Census Bureau's 2017 American Communities Survey—released in December—contains data on rental costs in individual census tracts. That survey shows a majority of renters in Deschutes County, and many in Jefferson and Crook counties spend more than the recommended 30 percent of their income on rent. As a whole, 52.8% of renters in Deschutes County, 47.2% of renters in Crook County and 46.2% of renters in Jefferson County pay more than 30% of their income toward rent and utilities.

As the only hospital system in the region, St. Charles is significantly impacted by the lack of workforce housing in two notable ways. First, displacement from the area makes it difficult to recruit and retain caregivers. The Regional Housing Needs Assessment found that affordable workforce apartments, small single-family homes and duplexes/triplexes/fourplexes are the top needs in the region. At St. Charles, an entry level CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) starts at \$15.00 an hour, or \$31,200 annually. Finding safe and dignified housing at this level is nearly impossible in Central Oregon.

Second, research shows that when people are in stable and secure housing, they are more able to access regular health care, which leads to improved health. Stable and secure housing reduces emergency department visits by an estimated 18% and reduces overall medical costs by 12%.

The workforce accelerator project promises technical assistance and direct funding to bolster the supply of housing for working families. Please consider passing and funding this legislation.

Sincerely,


Lisa Dobey
Executive Director, Community and Philanthropy

