



To: Members of House Judiciary Committee

From: Sheriff Pat Garrett, Washington County Sheriff's Office
Oregon State Sheriffs' Association
Oregon Association Chiefs of Police

Date: March 28, 2019

Re: HB 2982 – Testimony in Support

Chair Williamson and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Pat Garrett. I am the Washington County Sheriff and I am here today on behalf of the Oregon State Sheriff's Association and the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police to testify in support of House Bill 2982 with the dash-2 amendments. I commend Representatives Helm and Lewis, and Senator Steiner-Hayward for their leadership on this important issue.

As you may be aware, instances of abandoned properties which are in default and constitute a nuisance and may become occupied by squatters are increasingly common and can constitute a public health and public safety risk. In such cases, even though they don't have legal authority to occupy or use the abandoned properties, limitations in current law mean local governments can work continuously for many months to abate the nuisance in the face of significant community pressure to solve this problem. A factor which greatly compounds this problem include a distant property owner or interest holder who is unwilling to work with local officials to abate the nuisance, like trespass squatters from the property.

HB 2982 provides an appropriate mechanism in these cases whereby local governments can take reasonable actions to abate the nuisance in a timely manner, to include appropriately incentivizing the absent property owner or interest holder to help.

Several properties in default or foreclosure appear every year in Washington County which become abandoned. Some also become intermittently occupied by squatters and experience vandalism, graffiti, trash accumulation, and spread of vermin. In those cases, neighbors generate police calls. Patrol deputies work with our civil unit to resolve the nuisance property. Some of these cases involve a distant interest holder or bank who is unwilling or simply uninterested to assist us and the nuisance conditions persist for many months to the great frustration of surrounding neighbors. It's been our experience this problem exists in incorporated and unincorporated communities, as staff from our civil unit are occasionally called upon to testify in foreclosure hearings for properties in similar circumstances which are located inside cities.

It's important to note we continue to work with sponsors to address a few issues that can be accomplished when the bill reaches the Senate. I am happy to be part of that important work.

Thank you for your consideration.