

**House Committee on Rules  
Support for HB 2006  
April 24, 2019**

Good afternoon, Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Williamson and Wilson, and members of the Committee, my name is Monica Goracke. I live in Portland and I am the executive director of Oregon Law Center, one of Oregon's three legal aid programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 2006.

For any of you who are less familiar with our work, civil legal aid ensures fairness for all in the justice system, regardless of how much money a person has. Legal aid services help clients with critical needs like protection from domestic violence, maintaining safe housing, and ensuring access to health care and other public benefits.

According to the recent civil legal needs study undertaken by the Oregon Law Foundation, housing continues to rank among the top legal problems experienced by our client population. Oregon is the third most unaffordable rental market in the U.S. Over half of Oregon renters pay more than a third of their income for housing, and many pay more than 50% of their income, leaving too little to cover other basic needs. Our clients are skipping meals, forgoing medical attention, and moving further away from where they work. Evictions, and resulting homelessness, have increased in communities all across Oregon.

These problems disproportionately affect communities of color, seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. For example, domestic violence and sexual assault survivors in Oregon are 6.2 times more likely to be affected by homelessness, 3 times more likely to be affected by an employment issue, and 2.1 times more likely to be affected by a rental issue.

For these reasons, we support all of the provisions of HB 2006, which are designed to ensure assistance for domestic and sexual violence victims, as well as training, services, and outreach for landlords and tenant communities. In particular, section 2 of the bill would provide support for legal assistance for low-income Oregonians with housing matters.

Oregon's legal aid programs help prevent homelessness and address the affordable housing crisis in communities across the state in several ways:

- We provide outreach and targeted assistance to communities impacted by eviction and homelessness, including communities of color;
- We help prevent and end discrimination in housing;
- We help people with disabilities and seniors get and keep assisted housing;

- We work with tenants and housing providers to help low-income people receive subsidized housing benefits;
- We help develop and avoid the loss of affordable housing in several ways, including helping residents and nonprofits buy existing mobile home parks;
- We work to stop the loss of subsidized affordable housing when private owners fail to comply with promises they made to the government in exchange for building subsidies;
- We work with housing authorities and private landlords to provide training on housing law; and
- We provide web-based materials, public education, advice, limited services, and representation to help tenants and low-income clients facing foreclosure, to help them stay in their homes or get reasonable time to move to a new home.

With increased legal capacity, the state's legal aid providers could do more to address the housing crisis. Data from studies in other states show that families facing eviction end up with better outcomes when they have legal advice before going to court, and in addition, outcomes improve further when those households have representation in court. A funding increase of \$2 million per biennium would allow the hiring of new attorneys and support staff. This intervention would be particularly helpful in regions hard hit by the housing crisis like southern Oregon, central Oregon, and the coast, in addition to our larger cities.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today in support of low-income Oregonians who need legal assistance with their housing.