



February 6, 2020

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Marsh and Reschke, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Britt Conroy, and I serve as Public Policy Director with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. EMO supports HB 4010 and the -1 amendment, its federal disconnect and its creation of a study group to determine how opportunity zones could be used to truly build low-cost and work force housing or improve the lives of low-income Oregonians.

EMO serves 17,000 low-income Oregonians every year through nine direct service programs. These individuals walk through our doors needing help and seeking hope.

Our clients, and hundreds of thousands of others in this state, can tell you that the hardest job in Oregon is being poor. And it is doubly hard in the context of growing wealth disparity between those with tremendous means and the rest of our citizens, and in a moment when Oregon's lowest income quintile pay more of their income in taxes than our state's wealthiest 1%, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

The result of this disparity is that too many of our friends and neighbors find it difficult to pay the bills, feed their children or avoid housing instability. This reality manifests itself in shameful national rankings and heartbreaking statistics: We have the highest rate of K12 student homelessness in this country, and 1 in 9 Oregon households struggle to put food on the table.

It is in this context that EMO approaches tonight's discussion on opportunity zones. As you have heard today, most of the opportunity zone investments here in Oregon are going into areas that have already seen considerable development in recent years. Moreover, the benefits are going to investors in developments that would have happened even if opportunity zone state tax breaks were not available, putting in jeopardy resources needed to stand side-by-side with our struggling neighbors.

These are not Oregon values.

EMO supports the proposed disconnect, and urges passage of HB 4010 and the -1 amendment.

Thank you.

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