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**House Committee on Rules  
Testimony in Support of HB 4001A with Dash A7 amendment  
February 21, 2020**

Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee:

My name is Becky Straus and I am a Staff Attorney with the Oregon Law Center (OLC). OLC is a non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Thank you for the opportunity to express OLC's support of HB 4001A, with the Dash A7 amendment, which recognizes the current state of emergency in housing availability and affordability and takes bold steps to address it.

One of the most important issues in the lives of OLC's clients across the state is the challenge to find and maintain safe, stable, affordable housing. Housing is about much more than a roof over one's head; it is about opportunity, stability, and health. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible for families to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy. The majority of our client community is rent burdened – one emergency away from homelessness – or are houseless themselves, living either doubled-up or in shelter, or living outside without adequate shelter.

Statewide, Oregon's population is growing<sup>1</sup> and yet housing production lags behind.<sup>2</sup> The cost of housing is high while incomes and vacancy rates remain low. The result is a sharp increase<sup>3</sup> in recent years in the number of Oregonians experiencing homelessness, including an increase in the number of school children without the stability of home.<sup>4</sup> Families living just on the brink of homelessness do so with extreme rent burdens. One in four renters in our state is paying more than 50 percent of income in rent. For households with extremely low incomes, that number jumps to three out of four households paying more than 50 percent of income on rent. When tenants pay more than half their income towards rent, they do not have enough money left over to support themselves and their families.

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<sup>1</sup> Certified Population Estimates (July 1, 2019), Portland State University Population Research Center. [https://www.pdx.edu/prc/sites/www.pdx.edu/prc/files/Certified%20Population%20Estimates\\_%2012\\_15\\_2019.pdf](https://www.pdx.edu/prc/sites/www.pdx.edu/prc/files/Certified%20Population%20Estimates_%2012_15_2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Statewide Housing Plan 2018

<sup>3</sup> Oregon Homelessness Point in Time Count 2019

<sup>4</sup> Oregon Department of Education Homeless Student Data. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/esca/mckinney-vento/pages/default.aspx?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/esca/mckinney-vento/pages/default.aspx?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

In recent years this body has made historic investments in funding the solutions that we know will work: permanent housing, rent assistance and wrap-around services. But these solutions are not yet to scale and we still have more to do.

Released in August 2019, the Oregon Statewide Shelter Study reported that Oregon has among the highest rates of individuals experiencing homelessness and that Oregon is one of four states in which more than half of people experiencing homelessness are living unsheltered.<sup>5</sup> Emergency shelter is not a solution to homelessness, but it is a necessary part of addressing Oregon's statewide housing crisis at all points on the spectrum of housing insecurity. HB 4001A would enable communities to move quickly to build up desperately needed shelter capacity, with waiver of land use laws and funds for acquisition, preparation and support to meet capacity goals by next winter.

Further, we support changes in Sections 5 and 6 of the Dash A7 amendment, which help to facilitate development of and best practices in non-traditional shelter options such as car camping. For a myriad of reasons, not everyone is able to access emergency shelter. These changes in the bill promote safety for people who have no choice but to sleep in their vehicle, while they pursue options for permanent, stable housing.

OLC is grateful for the Speaker's leadership in bringing this bill forward. We thank you for your consideration and urge your support.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have. Thank you.

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<sup>5</sup> Oregon Statewide Shelter Study. <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/ISD/RA/Oregon-Statewide-Shelter-Study.pdf>