



HOUSING ALLIANCE

January 26, 2021

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to share more about our 2021 Housing Opportunity agenda, and the work that we'd like the Legislature to accomplish over the coming year to expand housing opportunity.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of ninety organizations from all parts of the state. Our members have come together with the knowledge that housing opportunity is the foundation on which all of our success is built – individual success as students, parents, workers, and community members as well as the success of our communities. We represent a diverse set of voices including housing developers, residents of affordable housing, local jurisdictions, and organizations working to meet basic needs in every corner of our state.

We believe that all Oregonians need a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew that already, too many seniors, families, and people who experience disabilities were paying too much of their income towards rent, and were experiencing other forms of housing instability. In Oregon, three out of four households with extremely low incomes pay over half of their income towards rent. When people pay that much of their income towards rent, they have too few resources left over for food, medicine, or utilities. An emergency of a few hundred dollars may mean they end up experiencing homelessness.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of us have spent much more time in our homes. It has become the place where we work, learn, worship, and play. Home has always been essential, and this year has showed us exactly how essential home is.

As the Legislature, you have mitigated the effects of housing instability for Oregonians across the state, by preventing evictions and foreclosures when people don't have enough to pay their rent or mortgage, you have directed funding for rental assistance programs, and critical support has gone to landlords and mortgage holders across Oregon, and you have directed funds to support people experiencing homelessness to find a safe place to shelter. This work, in many cases, has literally saved people's lives.

We know both by reviewing available data from the Census Pulse Survey¹, from national researchers², and local studies³ that the pandemic has significantly and negatively exacerbated people's economic

¹ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>

² <https://www.ncsha.org/resource/stout-rental-and-eviction-live-data/>

³ <https://www.pdx.edu/homelessness/oregon-renters-report>

instability and has impacted their ability to maintain their housing. Families of color have been particularly hard hit by COVID – both the impacts of job loss and the virus – due to systemic racism which has kept many in low wage jobs, or a legacy of environmental impacts which negatively affect their health. Recent research⁴ by Portland State University reflects that people of color are more likely to owe back rent. In addition, the wildfires that impacted our state this summer has meant the loss of many thousands of homes, including many that provided an affordable home to thousands of seniors and people with low incomes.

As the Housing Alliance enters the 2021 legislative session, we know we both need to address the pressing and immediate needs caused by COVID and wildfires, but we also know this work is irrevocably tied to the work of advancing housing opportunity. We are asking you to continue to invest in and pass policy changes to advance permanent solutions to these problems our communities face.

Today, I want to share with you some of those solutions. Our coalition includes housing providers, service providers, local jurisdictions, and advocates, and our goal is to hear multiple perspectives to get to the best policy possible to advance housing opportunity. We are a deliberative coalition and have been working hard to develop a 2021 agenda that identifies solutions to our state's housing problems. This year, we are working hard to incorporate a racial equity framework into our decision making, although that still is in progress and won't be completed this year.

Our priorities address the needs of folks experiencing homelessness, people who rent their homes, and people who own their homes. Our agenda includes policies and resources to prevent and end homelessness, to build and maintain affordable housing, and to support access to and maintenance of homeownership.

I want to share with you some of the policy proposals that are coming forward.

COVID Relief

In the third special session, the Legislature passed an eviction moratorium⁵ that will remain in place until June 30, 2021. This moratorium provides protection from eviction to people who rent their homes and may be unable to pay their rent due to income loss or increased expenses. In addition, the Legislature committed \$200 million to provide rent assistance - \$150 million to the Landlord Compensation Fund, and \$50 million for tenant based rental assistance in which tenants apply directly to local agencies for assistance. Together, these two proposals will both help provide safety and stability for people who rent their home who may be at risk of eviction, and provide financial assistance as well, helping to ensure that tenants do not exit the period of the eviction moratorium further in debt.

We are currently working to try to determine what we believe are the best next steps to support people who rent their homes after June 30. Our goal as a coalition is to help ensure housing stability and prevent instability and homelessness. We are examining a range of proposals from mediation, to additional rent assistance, to legal assistance, to further solutions, and look forward to sharing more about these proposals with you soon.

We would also note that Oregon's foreclosure moratorium was allowed to expire on December 31, 2020. While most Oregon homeowners are protected by the federal foreclosure moratorium⁶ that was implemented through the CARES Act, and continued by executive authority, approximately 30% of homeowners nationwide do not have a federally backed mortgage, and are not protected by the existing

⁴ <https://www.pdx.edu/homelessness/oregon-renters-report>

⁵ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2020S3/Measures/Overview/HB4401>

⁶ <https://www.nhlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020.04.10-NHLP-Homeowner-Relief-Info-Sheet-Update2.pdf>

moratorium. We urge the Legislature to extend the foreclosure moratorium for residential mortgages and provide counseling and mediation for homeowners.

Long Term Rent Assistance (LC 2639)

Long-term rent assistance is an effective strategy to prevent homelessness and provide an opportunity for affordable housing for people with low incomes around the state. However, existing resources are insufficient to meet the need. In 2018, approximately 47,000 households in Oregon received rent assistance through federal tenant-based or project-based vouchers.

These federal programs served one in four households that are eligible for these subsidies, meaning three in four households who are eligible for assistance did not receive it because of a lack of federal resources.

A recent study of long-term rent assistance⁷ provided in Multnomah County found that people who received the assistance experienced: an increase in housing stability and the ability to age in place for seniors; improved financial stability; reduced stress and anxiety and improved mental health; and support to address physical health needs.

We need to continue to advance housing solutions for people with the lowest incomes in our communities, and work across the continuum of needs. Long term rent assistance can support families in accessing more choice in housing to live near work or school, and it can provide stability for seniors and people with disabilities who live on fixed incomes. Long term rent assistance can prevent displacement for people and families, and support them to stay in neighborhoods and communities they have lived in for years.

LC 2639 requests that the Legislature should fund a study to examine a long-term rental assistance program. This study should analyze costs to provide long term-rent assistance with people experiencing housing instability across Oregon.

Building and Maintaining Affordable Homes

There are many ways in which the Legislature has supported the development of new affordable housing across our state, as well as maintaining our existing affordable housing. This critical work has built thousands of new homes in the last five years, with more under construction. We must continue to advance this work, particularly as we support communities to recover and rebuild from wildfire.

Investments in housing opportunity, especially for people with the lowest incomes, are an essential part of Oregon's response to the housing challenges our communities are facing.

I would highlight two other efforts. First, since 2015, the Legislature has invested in new affordable homes through the Local Innovation and Fast Track (LIFT) housing development program, one of the most important tools we have to create more affordable homes. The LIFT program supports the development of affordable housing with an emphasis on supporting rural communities, communities of color, and families, and since 2015, the program has funded the development of thousands of new rental homes, and hundreds of permanently affordable homes for sale. Affordable homes are a key part of our infrastructure in Oregon. These homes will be available and affordable for people with low incomes for decades to come.

⁷ https://www.nwpilotproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CORE_LRA-Final-Report.pdf

Oregon Housing and Community Services has a map of projects⁸, which shows these projects are being built in communities across our state, from Ontario and La Grande, to Florence and Klamath Falls, to Astoria and Portland, and so many other places in between.

Developers of affordable housing across Oregon are ready to do this work: they have completed project plans, acquired vacant land, and are waiting for resources to build these homes. Housing that is affordable and available is desperately needed across Oregon, and affordable housing developers stand ready to build it as soon as the Legislature makes funds available. Developers across Oregon have compiled a list of potential projects that is over \$200 million worth of projects which have plans, and in most cases, land identified and purchased. In addition, there will be a request for funds for permanent supportive housing, which will build homes for people with mental health issues, addiction issues, or complex medical needs who need additional support to remain stable in their homes.

We know how to build safe, stable, and affordable apartment homes, and we can create more of them in our community. We know that we can expand housing opportunity around the state and create homes that will be affordable for generations to come. Affordable homes created through this innovative effort will offer a better future for the families and individuals who call them home.

The other work I would highlight is that there are changes that we can make also to our land use laws that expedite and prioritize the development of affordable housing. We are working in collaboration with other stakeholders to look bills passed by the Legislature in recent sessions, and identify remaining gaps and barriers, and continue to advance this critical work.

Rebuilding after wildfires

Supporting communities to rebuild after wildfire will be critical work of this Legislature. It will be important to help rebuild the affordable housing that was lost, particularly in Southern Oregon, with the loss of so many manufactured homes. Manufactured homes often provide affordable housing for people with low incomes, seniors, and in this community, many Latinx families.

In January, the Emergency Board committed \$25 million to the Housing Authority of Jackson County to help rebuild affordable housing. We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to identify opportunities, needs, and work to ensure people who lost their homes in the wildfires can remain in their communities in safe and stable housing.

Individual Development Accounts

In addition, the Housing Alliance will urge the committee and the Legislature to continue its support of the Oregon Individual Development Account, or IDA, Initiative, a matched savings program that delivers economic opportunities to low-income individuals and communities of color, by extending the sunset on the IDA tax credit, and committing general fund resources to close the gap for the Initiative.

IDAs offer a hope for a better future for people with low incomes, by supporting them to save for the purchase of an asset.

IDAs allow someone to save, while taking financial education classes, with a goal in mind of purchasing an asset such as a home, an education, or supporting a small business. Their savings are matched from a state fund, which has been funded through a state tax credit.

⁸ <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1EfBBJ1Uo-pnRHzzQUc0NDWw7nNMV-Jcd&ll=44.63135601860089%2C-121.51131136283955&z=8>

IDAs are a testament to savers' long term financial health. One year after achieving their goals, 97% of all savers who used their savings for home purchase reported that they were current on their mortgage. 91% of all savers who opened a business reported that their doors are still open.

The Oregon IDA Initiative has dispersed \$12.1 million in matching funds to over 2,000 Oregon savers in 2018 and 2019 alone. On average, IDA participants are Oregonians with low-incomes, and save \$2,500 over 32 months, earning \$6,010 in matching funds towards their savings goal. IDAs significantly serve communities of color, with people of color making up the majority of IDA savers in Oregon.

The IDA Initiative has been fortunate to have the continued support of the Oregon State Legislature since 1999, through the continued reauthorization its funding mechanism, a credit on state and local taxes which are granted to taxpayers who contribute to the IDA Initiative.

We will be asking for your support to extend the tax credit, provide some general fund resources, and continue to allow the Oregon IDA Initiative to support new savers to open IDAs.

There are certainly more proposals we hope you will discuss and pass during the 2021 Legislative session, and we look forward to working together. Our full agenda, which is still in progress, can be found on our website at <https://www.oregonhousingalliance.org/2021agenda/>, and <https://www.oregonhousingalliance.org/2021endorsements/>. Information about community housing needs across the state can be found here: <https://www.oregonhousingalliance.org/housing-needs/>.

Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state, particularly in these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
211info
Aging in the Gorge
Benton Habitat for Humanity
Bienestar
Bradley Angle
BRIDGE Housing
Business for a Better Portland
CASA of Oregon
Chrisman Development
Central City Concern
Children First for Oregon
Church Women United of Lane County
City of Beaverton
City of Eugene
City of Hillsboro
City of Portland
City of Tigard
Clackamas County
Coalition of Community Health Clinics
Coalition of Housing Advocates
College Housing Northwest
Community Action Partnership of Oregon
Community Action Team
Community Alliance of Tenants
Community Development Partners
Community Housing Fund
Community Partners for Affordable Housing
Community Vision
Cornerstone Community Housing
DevNW
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Enhabit
Enterprise Community Partners
Fair Housing Council of Oregon
Farmworker Housing Development Corp.
FOOD for Lane County
Habitat for Humanity of Oregon
Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East
Hacienda CDC
Housing Authorities of Oregon
Housing Authority of Clackamas County
Housing Development Center
Housing Oregon
Human Solutions
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization

Impact Northwest
Innovative Housing, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance on Poverty
JOIN
Lane County Health and Human Services
League of Oregon Cities
League of Women Voters of Oregon
Lincoln County
Looking Glass Community Services
Mainstream Housing Inc.
Metro
Mid-Columbia Housing Authority
NAYA Family Center
Neighborhood Partnerships
NeighborImpact
NeighborWorks Umpqua
Network for Oregon Affordable Housing
Northwest Housing Alternatives
Northwest Pilot Project
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities
Oregon Food Bank
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Proud Ground
Raphael House
REACH CDC
Rogue Action Center
Rose CDC
St. Francis Shelter
St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Inc.
ShelterCare
Sisters Habitat for Humanity
Sponsors, Inc.
SquareOne Villages
Street Roots
Think Real Estate
Transition Projects
Washington County
Welcome Home Coalition