



March 11, 2021

To: The House Committee on Housing

From: Michele Ruffin, Oregon Political Director, Forward Together Action

Re: Support of HB 2578

Dear Chair Fahey and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michele Ruffin and I am the Oregon political director of Forward Together Action, a multi-issue organization working with Black, Indigenous, Women of Color and Non-Binary people to push for the systems change we need for all families to thrive. I'm testifying today on behalf of our organization's full support of HB 2578--- because we believe the mortgage interest deduction must be discontinued.

The mortgage interest deduction in practice today only serves those most wealthy in Oregon, and does nothing to serve our state's greatest needs. It currently offers a tax break to homeowners, not renters, and because of the way it is structured, it continues to concentrate wealth to the richest among us. This deduction costs the state \$1 billion per budget period, which is money we could be using for direct resourcing in other critical housing services and needs. This is, yet again, another example of our tax policies that benefit white, wealthy Oregonians even when race is not explicitly mentioned.

A 2019 task force report by this very body of the legislature revealed that homeownership by white Oregonians is over 65% compared to 32.2% for Black Oregonians, and 40.8% for Hispanic or Latino homeownership rates.¹ Combine this with the very well-known history Oregon has as a

¹ https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/citizen_engagement/Reports/2019-JARDHO-Addressing%20Barriers%20to%20Home%20Ownership%20for%20People%20of%20Color%20in%20Oregon.pdf



white-only state and the consistent impact our property taxes have had on exacerbating gentrification, the picture we then see is crystal clear: tax policies such as the mortgage interest deduction are inequitable and racist.

We thank Representatives Pham, Fahey and Senator Dembrow for bringing this legislation forward and we ask the committee to help right the wrongs of the past by supporting HB 2578.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Political Director

Forward Together Action