



NeighborImpact

Supporting People, Strengthening Communities.

March 28, 2020

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chairs Beyer and Gomberg, members of the committee:

Oregon Housing and Community Services seeks authorization of its budget for the upcoming biennium. I write today to stress the vital importance of continuing the important work of stabilizing Oregon's housing market in these unprecedented times.

My organization, NeighborImpact, is the community action agency serving Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson Counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. In a normal year, we serve about 1 in 4 Central Oregonians with one or more of our 13 services. In COVID times we are serving about one-third more individuals with food, energy, housing, homeownership counseling, childcare and early childhood education. In calendar year 2020, we served individuals just short of 400,000 times. We distributed more than \$17 million in cash and cash equivalents to community members by paying rents, paying utility bills, paying mortgages and providing food.

The financial relationship between community action agencies and Oregon Housing has never been more intertwined. The viability of the community action model has been tested by COVID and found worth. The model was built specifically to ensure the existence of a statewide but locally connected network that would have the technical capacity and resource base to move large amount of assistance with efficiency throughout all of Oregon. The model is also designed to be flexible to expand as needed to meet extraordinary and unforeseen circumstances—such as pandemics and wildfires. In 2020, it did just that.

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United Way
of Deschutes County



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The OHCS budget, which distributed federal and state funding to the network, is important to helping not just COVID-affected Oregonians, but all Oregonians who struggle to manage the economics of a housing market where a family making the median income of \$63,000 – Oregon’s median income--is supposed to be able to rent or buy a home with a median price tag \$550,000 or more. The economics simply do not work without help. Likewise, state assistance is crucial to addressing the unacceptable consequences of homelessness, which has exploded across the state and which now is three times the national average.

Oregon Housing works with Community Action by passing through funds from the Emergency Housing Account, State Homeless Assistance Program, document recording fees and other resources. These funds in turn leverage other funding, including federal and private, and are redistributed to other community-based organizations (homeless shelters, youth shelters and domestic violence shelters, as well as cultural organizations) to extend the work of the state and the network.

Oregon Housing also calls on organizations like mine to assist in emergencies. During COVID, my agency expended all of its CARES Act rental assistance prior to the December 31 deadline. We are now distributing the E-Board approved STARR money and will soon launch the federal ERA program—the largest single assistance program in our history. These programs, passed through from OHCS, are doing their job in keeping Oregonians housed and stable.

We appreciate the importance of the OHCS budget to our continuing ability to do our work at the community level. We appreciate the leadership of OHCS looking to shorten the timeline wherever possible between authorization of state and federal funding and the time it takes to put money in consumers’ wallets.

We urge your support of an adequate funding to allow OHCS to fulfill its core functions and to address urgent disaster-related needs. The middle of a pandemic is no time to seek major changes to the way things are working, and we urge you to enable OHCS to pursue its traditional good work serving Oregonians in need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott Cooper
Executive Director, NeighborImpact