

February 16, 2021

Dear Oregon House Committee on Housing,

Thanks for the chance to testify in support of HB 2583, which would prohibit any public body from establishing or enforcing a maximum occupancy cap on any dwelling unit.

Occupancy caps stop homeowners from turning their large, underoccupied homes into rooming houses by renting out all the empty bedrooms. Rooming houses were once the main form of affordable housing in Oregon and nationwide. For decades they offered inexpensive shelter for people who couldn't afford other housing. But because restrictions such as occupancy caps have shut down most rooming houses, more of these people now live in tents on the sidewalks.

HB 2853 could be a first step toward addressing Oregon's affordable-housing shortage. By blocking occupancy caps, it could allow governments to partner with nonprofits and homeowners to fill more bedrooms in existing homes. This could provide affordable housing at lower cost than building new apartments. Living alone in large houses, many homeowners may feel lonely, or need help paying their mortgages, but may feel uncomfortable searching for roommates on their own. By providing roommate screening, and lightly subsidizing rents on bedrooms, local governments could help these homeowners fill those bedrooms with suitable low-income roommates. Governments and nonprofits could also purchase large, empty homes for use as halfway houses--if HB 2853 passes so that occupancy caps no longer prevent that.

Using data from federal housing surveys, I calculate that Oregon has about 1.5 million spare bedrooms statewide, including over 1 million in occupied homes. (Details reported on following pages.) As researcher Michael Andersen of the Sightline Institute observes, filling even 1 percent of those bedrooms with one resident apiece would house 15,000 people, roughly the number of unhoused people in Oregon. (<https://www.sightline.org/2021/02/10/it-should-be-legal-to-live-in-more-of-oregons-1-5-million-empty-bedrooms/>)

You've received opposing testimony objecting that this bill would allow unsafe and unsanitary overcrowding. Bear in mind that no one chooses to live in overcrowded dwellings if they have better options. Occupancy caps don't create affordable, uncrowded housing for anyone prohibited from sharing a residence. Instead, the caps force many of these people into the streets, making their living conditions even less safe and less sanitary. If governments and nonprofits ever provide enough uncrowded housing for everyone who needs it, that'll be great. But since that hasn't happened yet, let's pass HB 2853 and stop depriving many homeless Oregonians of housing better than any now available to them.

Thanks for your time.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leon Porter". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Leon Porter

## SPARE BEDROOM DATA FOR OREGON

The tables below shows numbers of homes with various numbers of bedrooms and various numbers of residents in Oregon. Except as noted, these figures are based on 2014-2018 American Community Survey data. We are interested in finding the numbers of spare bedrooms, so each table only shows numbers of homes with more bedrooms than residents. An 'X' in a table indicates homes that have no spare bedrooms and that therefore are not included in the calculations.

I extracted this data using the iPUMS site (<https://sda.usa.ipums.org>). Since the data source doesn't provide exact numbers of bedrooms in houses with 5 or more bedrooms, I treat each house as having the lowest number of bedrooms in in the range shown. For example, I treat each 7-11 bedroom house as having exactly 7 bedrooms. To calculate the numbers of spare bedrooms, I assume that each resident gets one bedroom, so the number of spare bedrooms in a home is the number of bedrooms minus the number of residents. All numbers below are approximations based on partial surveys; allow for margins of error.

**TABLE 1: NUMBERS OF OREGON HOMES WITH VARIOUS NUMBERS OF BEDROOMS AND RESIDENTS**

Homes with	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4 bedrooms	5-6 bedrooms	7-11 bedrooms	12+ bedrooms
1 resident	137,413	131,561	24,062	3,984	1,530	255
2 residents	X	269,149	79,963	13,610	1,353	485
3 residents	X	X	43,704	8,036	1,198	147
4 residents	X	X	X	10,602	963	249
5 residents	X	X	X	X	973	375
6 residents	X	X	X	X	1,102	276
7 residents	X	X	X	X	X	87
8 residents	X	X	X	X	X	203
9 residents	X	X	X	X	X	0
10 residents	X	X	X	X	X	23
11 residents	X	X	X	X	X	7
Number of SPARE bedrooms	137,413	532,271	275,816	83,440	26,674	16,551

TOTAL NUMBER OF SPARE BEDROOMS IN OCCUPIED HOMES IN OREGON: 1,072,165

And how many of these spare bedrooms are in owner-occupied homes vs. rentals? To find out, we can generate the table again with a filter to only show owner-occupied homes:

**TABLE 2: NUMBERS OF OREGON OWNER-OCCUPIED HOMES WITH VARIOUS NUMBERS OF BEDROOMS AND RESIDENTS**

Homes with	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	4 bedrooms	5-6 bedrooms	7-11 bedrooms	12+ bedrooms
1 resident	66,120	110,848	21,179	3,601	743	90
2 residents	X	230,951	75,312	12,571	1,164	347
3 residents	X	X	38,408	7,385	1,018	147
4 residents	X	X	X	9,375	871	223
5 residents	X	X	X	X	690	350
6 residents	X	X	X	X	761	226
7 residents	X	X	X	X	X	69
8 residents	X	X	X	X	X	112
9 residents	X	X	X	X	X	0
10 residents	X	X	X	X	X	23
11 residents	X	X	X	X	X	7
Number of SPARE bedrooms	66,120	452,647	252,569	76,262	19,104	12,219

TOTAL NUMBER OF SPARE BEDROOMS IN OWNER-OCCUPIED HOMES IN OREGON:  
878,921

According to the 2017 data (at <https://factfinder.census.gov>), 61.7% of occupied homes in Oregon are owner-occupied, and the other 38.3% are rentals. But among Oregon's occupied homes, those that are owner-occupied have 82% of the spare bedrooms, whereas rental units have only 18%. Owner-occupied homes tend to be considerably larger and emptier than rental homes, on average.

How many empty bedrooms are there in Oregon's vacant homes? Let's calculate.

The 2017 data (at <https://factfinder.census.gov>) shows 1,733,041 housing units total, including 161,410 vacant units, or 9.3% of the total.

The housing units included 171,001 one-bedroom homes, 481,094 two-bedroom homes, 722,838 three-bedroom homes, 245,106 four-bedroom homes, and 61,591 homes with five or more bedrooms.

Our data doesn't show separate vacancy rates for homes with specific numbers of bedrooms. But using the overall 9.3% vacancy rate for the state, we can estimate 15,903 vacant one-bedroom homes, 44,741 vacant two-bedroom homes, 67,223 vacant three-bedroom homes, 22,794 vacant four-bedroom homes, and 5,727 vacant homes with five or more bedrooms.

That gives us at least 426,865 empty bedrooms in vacant homes--not counting studio apartments, and not counting bedrooms beyond the fifth in homes with six or more bedrooms!

Adding this to the 1,072,165 spare bedrooms in occupied homes gives us:

TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPTY BEDROOMS IN VACANT AND OCCUPIED HOMES IN OREGON:  
1,499,030

--calculated by Leon Porter, [leonporter@yahoo.com](mailto:leonporter@yahoo.com)