



## **Testimony About Removing Barriers to Housing**

**Cristina Palacios, Unite Oregon**

**January 19, 2023**

Chair Dexter, Vice Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about current housing barriers and proposed community solutions. My name is Cristina Palacios and I am here on behalf of Unite Oregon and our 32,542 members, many of whom are renters. Our organization is led by black, indigenous, people of color, immigrants and refugees, rural communities, and people experiencing poverty, who work across Oregon to build a unified intercultural movement for justice.

Our communities have struggled to secure housing for a long time and that has been exacerbated by the pandemic and fires over the last 3 years. Many of our members, both families and students, have been living in motels, shared homes, vehicles, couch surfing, or outside. Even those who have qualified for government resources and insurance have faced many hurdles as a result of temporary housing, lack of affordability and sustainability, communication barriers, and so forth. The housing standards have not been livable including mold, clean air, heating and cooling, and other basic needs. Hotels don't have accessible kitchens so folks eat out which is expensive, unhealthy, and difficult when accommodating dietary restrictions. Students are living outside their districts and have traveled up to four hours to get to school. Many have not been able to keep up with homework and have fallen incredibly behind. The traumatic experiences related to losing a home have led to an increase in mental and physical health needs and our communities deserve more.

We believe a comprehensive approach to housing solutions requires us to acknowledge emergency housing needs, living standards, affordability, accessibility, transparency and lack of protections. Here are two housing packages our communities have asked us to support:

1. Housing Justice for All (Bil number has yet to be determined)
  - a. Higher standards for emergency housing, similar to if not exceeding fair housing standards.
  - b. Increase in funds distributed by and provided for the Oregon Department of Emergency Management to support more folks in a timely manner.

- c. Provide emergency resources that are accessible to all, despite documentation.
2. Stable Homes for Oregon Families (Still awaiting certain bill numbers)
  - a. Rent assistance for communities in need and a 60-day safe harbor when awaiting a response from rental assistance applications.
  - b. Eviction reform to stop fast-track evictions (from 3 to 10 days) and prevent landlords from refusing payments.
  - c. Set reasonable rent limits for folks to afford housing and inflation.
  - d. Track rental market data so we know more about housing availability and needs.

In both proposals, we will prioritize accessibility through language access, information sharing, program promotion, sustainability, and resource distribution through government entities and organizational partners that have deep rooted community connections.

Rural Oregon residents need more housing support in response to climate disasters and urban communities need protections against inflation. We propose higher quality standards and increased long-term sustainable funds for emergency housing, affordable housing, rent assistance and protections, eviction reform, reasonable rent limits, and market data. Our community members have shared their stories, we are advocating for their needs, and together with Oregon we look forward to serving our residents.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cristina Palacios

Unite Oregon