



NeighborImpact

Supporting People, Strengthening Communities.

March 15, 2023

House Committee on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chair Helfrich, Vice-Chair Gamba, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of HB 3487. My name is Sonia Capece, and I represent the HomeSource Department at NeighborImpact. We urge your support for the work of the Joint Task Force on Addressing Racial Disparities in Homeownership by passing this important piece of legislation.

As the Director of the Homeownership Center for Central Oregon, I see every day how challenging homeownership can be in our region. The affordability gap is widening, and the ability to attain homeownership has historically been disproportionately affecting people of color. When affordability gaps are as wide as they are now, residents need the assistance of certified housing counselors to close that gap, they need education, down payments and unbiased guidance, which is what we offer to Central Oregonians. Unfortunately, we are unable to help them all. Down Payment is underfunded, program waitlists are long, and counselors have more cases than they should due to a shortage in stable funding.

The Joint Advisory Task Force on Addressing Racial Disparities in Homeownership found specifically that Black Oregonians have the lowest rates of homeownership, with 32.2% of households owning a home, compared to 65.1% of White Oregonians. Similarly, the Task Force found that an additional 63,842 households of color would need to become homeowners to eliminate the gap in homeownership rates. Out of its work between the 2022 and 2023 Legislative Sessions, the Task Force developed and adopted eleven proposals, the majority of which were supported on a bipartisan basis.

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United Way
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HB 3487 is a combination of four of these proposals. These proposals include the following:

- **Reporting.** The bill makes a simple yet important direction for the Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS) to report to the Legislative Assembly continuing racial disparities in homeownership by September 15 of each even-numbered year.
- **Down Payment Assistance.** As part of its own internal work to address racial disparities in homeownership, this bill would also direct OHCS to review its own policies and rules to take steps to remove barriers for individuals without Social Security Numbers to access state programs such as down payment assistance.
- **Assisting homeownership organizations.** The bill further directs OHCS to provide more support to housing counselors and other persons who support homeownership programs, including training and technical assistance.
- **Financial literacy provisions.** Requires OHCS, in partnership with DCBS and BOLI, to develop financial literacy materials, translated into the five most commonly spoken languages other than English, and distribute the same to mortgage brokers and bankers in the state.

As homeownership is becoming increasingly out of reach, it is important to make sure that the state continues to monitor how racial disparities in homeownership are improving or worsening. It also remains important to ensure that homeownership organizations and housing counseling agencies are supported by our state partners and that those who seek mortgage financing are able to make informed decisions about whether or not they are supported through one of the many homeownership support organizations across the state.

Homeownership continues to be a foundational tool for stable, vibrant and strong communities. We urge your support for HB 3488. Thank you for your time and for your service to the state.

Sincerely,

The signature is written in a blue, cursive script.

Sonia Capece
HomeSource Director
NeighborImpact