



We build strength, stability, self-reliance *and* shelter.

March 21, 2023

RE: **Support for HB 3431**

Dear Chair Bynum, Vice-Chair Morgan, Vice-Chair Nguyen and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shannon Vilhauer and I am the Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Oregon. On behalf of our Board of Directors and the 24 local Habitat for Humanity affiliates we serve, I am writing to express Habitat for Humanity of Oregon's strong support of HB 3431, which calls to fully fund The Oregon Economic Equity Investment Act.

Habitat for Humanity has long worked to provide families with the opportunity build intergenerational wealth by owning a key asset: their home. Habitat for Humanity also provides low-income homeowners with critical home improvements in Oregon communities of all sizes.

Building household stability and prosperity in diverse communities across Oregon is at the heart of our mission, programs and actions. We believe that access to resources and opportunity is the means to an economically vibrant and just society. We support the targeted investment of resources and services in proportion to the need in communities, particularly those that have been harmed by racism in our society's laws, policies, institutions and culture.

The Equity Investment Act will create intergenerational wealth building opportunities in Oregon's most economically vulnerable communities by growing small businesses, providing critical workforce training and increasing homeownership access for Oregonians who stand to benefit the most.

We know firsthand that homeownership is an incredible wealth building opportunity for households of modest means. Through policies like redlining and disparate access to credit, people of color have not had fair access to homeownership opportunities in the United States. Over decades, this disparate access has resulted in a well-documented racial wealth gap.

For 30% of households in the United States, their home is their only source of wealth. Prosperity Now conducted a study in 2016 on families who earn the median income in their communities. For renter households at this income level, their net worth was \$5,200. Homeowners at the same income level had accrued \$200,000 in household wealth.

The Economic Equity Investment Program has been carefully and thoughtfully designed by Business Oregon to help close the wealth gap that exists for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities across Oregon. This pilot program is long overdue and a critical step to reckoning with racist policies and systemic inequities in policing and elsewhere.

Habitat for Humanity of Oregon is among the many organizations who recently applied for a portion of these initially allocated resources. The process administered by Business Oregon was clearly designed to

attract thoughtful and compelling applications from culturally-responsive, community-based organizations that support paths to homeownership, workforce development and entrepreneurship. We strongly support these critical investments in diverse communities in Oregon.

With the effects from the compounding crises of over-policing, COVID-19, rising household costs and other economic strains—now more than ever, we must strengthen Oregon's future by investing in historically underserved communities. We urge your support of HB 3431 to empower hardworking Oregonians across the state to plant roots in the local community, build wealth and strengthen the cities and towns we can all be proud to call home.

Thank you for your service and sheer hard work,



Shannon M. Vilhauer, Executive Director