



4/10/2023

Chair Jama and members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development,

I am writing on behalf of the HereTogether coalition to express enthusiastic support for HB 2984A, which would support the conversion of commercial buildings into housing within urban growth boundaries. This bill is an important step towards addressing the housing crisis that is currently affecting many communities across our state.

As you are aware, there is a critical shortage of affordable housing across Oregon. This shortage has contributed to rising homelessness rates and a lack of stability for many families and individuals. At the same time, many commercial buildings sit vacant, particularly in downtown areas where businesses have struggled to stay afloat.

HB 2984A offers a common-sense solution to these problems by encouraging the conversion of underutilized commercial buildings into much-needed housing. Additionally, this proposal would help to reduce our region's carbon footprint in the face of a changing climate by repurposing existing buildings instead of constructing new ones.

The proposed bill aligns with strategies the HereTogether coalition outlined in the [2023 HereTogether Roadmap](#), which recommends proven solutions that can scale up to accelerate our community's response to homelessness. Specifically, the Roadmap, signed by more than 220 organizations, businesses, and leaders across the Portland Metro region, recommends that state and local policymakers should work to **identify and remove barriers to converting empty office spaces into affordable housing and provide incentives for doing so**. As telecommuting remains a regular feature of daily work, developing more housing units represents a significant opportunity.

We recognize that this proposal is not aimed at building strictly affordable housing. We will continue to advocate for more affordable housing at all levels, especially deeply affordable units. Still, we recognize that increasing housing supply, especially smaller units, is critical for decreasing overall housing costs across the state.

The HereTogether coalition strongly believes that HB 2984A would be a win-win for our state in order to address rising rates of homelessness, housing insecurity and revitalizing struggling downtowns across the state.

Sincerely,

Cole Merkel
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Here Together—a 250+ member coalition comprising service providers, business leaders, faith leaders, advocates and more—strives to create a Portland metro region where homelessness is rare and brief by advocating for near term and permanent solutions, systems change and accountability necessary to effectively scale up resources and serve our most vulnerable neighbors.