



To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon

February 08, 2024

**Re: Testimony in opposition of SB 1537 Unless Amended**

Testimony Submitted On behalf of all the OCN Member Organizations:

ten00 Friends of Oregon, Association of Oregon Recyclers, Audubon Society of Portland, Beyond Toxics, Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Center for Food Safety, Central Oregon LandWatch, Climate Solutions, Defenders of Wildlife, Deschutes River Alliance, Engineers for a Sustainable Future, The Environmental Center, Environment Oregon, Food & Water Watch, Friends of Mount Hood, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Friends of Family Farmers, Greater Hells Canyon Council, League of Women Voters of Oregon, Native Fish Society, Neighbors for Clean Air, Oceana, Oregon Coast Alliance, Oregon Environmental Council, Oregon Land and Water Alliance, Oregon League of Conservation Voters, Oregon Natural Desert Association, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition, Oregon Wild, Renewable Northwest, Rogue Riverkeeper, Sierra Club Oregon Chapter, The Street Trust, Surfrider Foundation, Trout Unlimited, Tualatin Riverkeepers, WaterWatch of Oregon, The Wetlands Conservancy, Wild Salmon Center, Willamette Riverkeeper

Dear Chair Jama, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer input on SB 1537. On behalf of our tens of thousands of members and supporters across the state of Oregon, we would like to register the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV), and the Oregon Conservation Network's (OCN) opposition to passing SB 1537 as it is currently written. The OCN is coordinated through the OLCV and is a network of over 40 not-for-profit organizations throughout the state, united to advocate for pro-conservation legislation and to fight policies that threaten our state's natural legacy.

When the OCN voted to make **SB 1537 a Major Threat to a Healthy Oregon** we did not make the decision lightly. This testimony is intended to clarify our position that the large urban growth boundary expansions allowed in the bill are detrimental to urgently solving our affordable housing crisis and to our state's environmental values. OCN opposes the bill because of the large UGB expansion provisions and urge the timeline of ten years to be reduced to five.

## **We strongly support many parts of this bill - but core, problematic issues from HB 3414 (2023) remain**

We are grateful to Governor Kotek and her staff for engaging with us, and for the progress made to improve the legislation we now see in SB 1537. There are many pieces of SB 1537 that we strongly support, including needed infrastructure funding and climate-smart housing incentives. And, assuming that technical amendments are forthcoming that will address the issues we've raised regarding environmental regulations and variances, this bill makes important strides towards embracing a housing production strategy that is climate forward and maintains environmental protections. However, we have been clear from the beginning that the reason HB 3414 (2023) became a Major Threat was because of the UGB expansion sections - and these issues have not yet been fully addressed in SB 1537.

Protecting our land use system is not only important for solving our housing crisis, it's important for addressing the climate crisis, core to our environmental values, and it's important to the people of Oregon. The Oregon Values and Belief Center's (OVBC) 2023 survey found that overwhelmingly (at 84%) people say they like living here because of the access to nature and the outdoors. "This is the #1 ranked consideration for men, women, urban and rural, white, and BIPOC Oregonians," according to the OVBC. One of the key reasons our state is so special is because of Oregon's iconic land use laws, including established urban growth boundaries (UGBs). These laws are at the heart of Oregon's livability. They ensure thoughtful, equitable development by building more compact, walkable towns and cities with diverse, accessible housing and transportation options, rather than endless sprawl that is not affordable, exacerbates climate change, and paves over natural areas, forests, and farm lands.

### **Why SB 1537 is still a Major Threat Until Amended**

We've been clear that we do not believe that overriding land use laws to expand UGBs to address Oregon's housing crisis is necessary at all. Rather, if we focus and invest in infrastructure that makes available land shovel ready for development, and allow the Oregon Housing Needs Analysis (OHNA) to take root, we can more effectively and urgently deliver the housing every Oregonian needs and deserves. In the spirit of giving the OHNA process the opportunity to succeed we are asking the bill be amended to reduce the timeline from ten years to five years. Currently we expect the OHNA process to take effect within two years, which means there will be up to eight years of time where cities could choose the UGB expansion option from SB 1537, which will have less stringent affordability requirements than an OHNA process would require. We don't want SB 1537 to lead to cities sidestepping the OHNA option which will lead to more affordable housing more quickly than if the cities use the process provided through SB 1537.

Further, lands inside current UGBs should not have to compete with UGB expansions for scarce infrastructure dollars. Adding more land, when so many cities need investments in the lands they already have, exacerbates existing infrastructure funding gaps and fails to make the most of the land we have. This is detrimental to building more housing and it is not a responsible use of Oregon's resources.

Since June 2023, we have engaged in good faith on a weekly basis with the Governor's office and other decision-makers and made clear what would need to change in this year's housing bill to

avoid a Major Threat designation. While some changes have been made, the core issue of large, expedited UGB expansions remains.

We have been clear since June of 2023 that, while we typically oppose any new policy allowing for expedited UGB expansions that undermine the land use program, **we were willing to compromise if two significant improvements were made:** 1) A real demonstration of need for more land in order to qualify for the expedited UGB expansion; and 2) Substantially reducing the large size of the expansion areas, currently at 75 and 150 net acres.

The latest version of SB 1537 addresses issue #1 - but not #2. These two changes go hand in hand. It is for this reason that this bill in its current form remains a Major Threat.

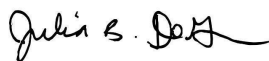
**Please amend and pass SB 1537**

Removing sections 48-54 ensures we can focus Oregon's funds and policies on building more compact, liveable, climate-friendly communities that include a diversity of housing, including deeply affordable and middle housing. SB 1537 now includes a smaller 15 acre UGB expansion option. If the large acreage expansion is removed but the smaller provision remains as is, OCN will remove the Major Threat status of this bill. Short of removing the entire large acreage provisions, we urge that the acreage be significantly reduced. We also urge the legislature to reduce the timeline from ten years to five to avoid sidestepping the OHNA process.

We all agree: Oregon has a housing crisis. SB 1537 has tremendous potential to urgently and effectively tackle this crisis with impactful policies that boost affordable and middle housing production - the housing Oregonians need most, now. With the amendments outlined here, this bill will dramatically increase housing quantity, choice, and affordability in every Oregon community.

We can and must take meaningful actions to deliver the climate-friendly housing Oregonians need, where they need it, and quickly. Thankfully, we have a Governor and State Legislature poised to take historic action to pass transformative housing production legislation in 2024. We continue to be dedicated partners with you in this effort.

Sincerely,



Julia B. DeGraw  
Coalition Director  
Oregon Conservation Network, and Oregon League of Conservation Voters