



DEVELOPING THRIVING COMMUNITIES

February 15, 2024

House Committee on Revenue
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Opposition for HB 4056

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chair Reschke, Vice-Chair Walters and Members of the Committee:

My name is Emily Reiman and I am the CEO at DevNW, an affordable housing development and asset-building agency serving Lane, Linn, Benton, Lincoln, Marion, Polk and Clackamas Counties. We have also been one of the largest providers of foreclosure prevention counseling services throughout Oregon since 2011.

DevNW currently sits in opposition to HB 4056. While we strongly support returning surplus funds to former homeowners, and we understand that Counties would like a clear and defined pathway to necessary foreclosures, we do not believe that HB 4056 goes nearly far enough in protecting the rights of homeowners. We believe it looks to create a “safe harbor” for Counties to make wholly insufficient efforts.

DevNW would strongly recommend a collaborative work group to create a stronger bill for the 2025 session, that includes homeowner input (especially from seniors and BIPOC communities), and that looks to address the following:

- Creates a longer look-back window, for homeowners who had their wealth unconstitutionally taken by Counties more than 6 years ago;
- Establishes longer timelines to claim surpluses moving forward;
- Places more responsibility on Counties for proactive outreach to find former owners or heirs (notice doesn't do any good if it's to a foreclosed address!);
- Establishes plain language notices, in multiple languages, and accessible font sizes (you heard that efforts had been made toward plain language, but that was plain language according to experts and lawyers; we need 80 year old homeowners to verify whether the language makes sense to them);
- Requires that Counties maximize the value of the home at sale;
- Limits the funds that Counties can keep in addition to back taxes (e.g. staff time, without limits, could quickly become exorbitant).



DEVELOPING THRIVING COMMUNITIES

We disagree with the Counties on the extreme urgency to rush through poorly thought-out legislation in 2024, when it could harm the very homeowners that we're seeking to protect. Multnomah County has clearly already created a pathway for former homeowners to file claims, and other Counties can do the same. Counties are nervous about not have the protection of statewide legislation for the next year, in the event that they don't do a sufficient job of returning unconstitutional 'takings' to Oregon Families. With 4056, they are effectively asking the state to offer a safe harbor for doing an inadequate job of restoring homeowner rights and wealth.

I wish that the Counties had reached out to foreclosure counseling agencies, consumer advocacy agencies, and partners who work with low-income, senior, and BIPOC homeowners before session, so we could have crafted a stronger bill for 2024. To my knowledge, they did not. Property right advocates are an important contributor, but do not substitute for the direct representation of the needs or perspectives of our most vulnerable homeowners – whose voices are noticeably absent.

These issues are too complex – and too important – to try to resolve in 48 hours in hallway conversations. We urge you to take the time needed to create a stronger bill in the interim, and to bring this issue back in 2025. DevNW is ready and willing to lend our expertise to a collaborative process.

Sincerely,

Emily Reiman
CEO
DevNW