

February 14, 2025

Re: Support for Mixed Use Affordable Housing in Portland Metro Area (SB 949)

Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Senate Committee On Housing and Development,

On behalf of Colas Construction, I am submitting testimony in support of SB 949, which directs the Housing and Community Services Department to establish a project to develop affordable housing that integrates residential units with community spaces and services in the Portland metropolitan area.

Colas Construction is a Portland-based, Black-owned general contractor with over 25 years of experience building projects that strengthen and uplift our communities. Our mission is to build legacies and strengthen communities through quality construction and deep, lasting partnerships. We understand that housing is more than shelter; it is the foundation for thriving families and neighborhoods. We have had the privilege of working alongside Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI), a critical institution serving the Black community in Portland, to construct transformative developments such as The Herndon and The Knauls buildings as part of the Alberta Alive projects. We are currently building SEI's Strong Family Apartments, another development that will provide affordable housing and foster community in the historically Black neighborhoods of North and Northeast Portland.

Our work on these projects has shown us firsthand the need for increased investment in mixed-use affordable housing. Developments like those led by SEI not only provide families with safe and stable homes but also offer essential services, resources, and community spaces that empower residents to thrive. These projects address the unique needs of families who have been marginalized and displaced by decades of systemic disinvestment and gentrification.

SEI has been a tireless advocate and service provider for Portland's Black community for over 40 years. Their work extends far beyond housing; they offer comprehensive programs focused on education, workforce development, family stabilization, and poverty reduction. The Alberta Alive development is a testament to SEI's holistic approach, combining 115 units of affordable housing with spaces that foster connection and opportunity. With the Strong Family property under construction, SEI is continuing its mission to provide not just housing but homes that support the well-being and success of families.

However, as we have seen through our work with SEI and other community partners, existing tax credit and funding mechanisms are often insufficient to achieve the kind of mixed-use developments that truly serve residents. SB 949 represents a crucial opportunity to fill this gap. By investing in projects that integrate housing with services and community spaces, we can ensure that families have access to the resources they need to thrive, while fostering a sense of belonging and stability in neighborhoods where displacement has been all too common.

This bill and this funding are a necessary investment in the future of our city and its people. Supporting SB 949 sends a clear message to historically marginalized communities: You deserve

the very best. Your families deserve quality homes and vibrant neighborhoods that support your growth and success.

For these reasons, Colas Construction strongly urges your support for SB 949. We stand with SEI and other community partners in the belief that affordable housing must be more than bricks and mortar. It must be a foundation for opportunity, dignity, and lasting community.

Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Alexander Colas
VP, Preconstruction
Colas Construction