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**Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Testimony in Support of SB 599  
March 5, 2025**

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 599, to ensure that all Oregonians have access to fair housing, regardless of their immigration or citizenship status.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Helping families maintain safe, stable housing is a critical part of our work. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy. As vacancy rates have plummeted and housing has become less and less affordable across the state, our clients have increasingly struggled to maintain stability for themselves and their children. Increasingly, low and moderate-income tenants risk homelessness as a result of any displacement from current housing.

Housing crises such as the one we are currently experiencing tend to amplify pre-existing racial and ethnic disparities in housing access and stability. Immigrants and refugees, particularly those in mixed-status households, often face greater housing insecurity and experience fear about their housing stability. Senate Bill 599 will provide reassurance and greater stability for these groups, contributing to the overall well-being of our communities.

Oregon has long been a leader in promoting equitable treatment and protecting the rights of all its residents. However, despite existing protections, individuals without certain immigration statuses continue to face significant fear and other barriers in securing housing. This not only undermines the dignity of affected individuals but also exacerbates housing instability and homelessness within our communities.

Oregon's Fair Housing Act (codified at ORS 659A.421) already prohibits discrimination on the basis of race and national origin, and many housing providers already adhere to best practices to ensure fair treatment. However, our current statutes do not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on immigration or citizenship status. Passage of SB 599 is necessary to close that gap and ensure that all Oregonians, regardless of their immigration status, have equitable access to housing.

The bill is drafted based on provisions in Portland City Code [30.01.086 \(D\)](#) that have been in effect since 2019 and on statutes in other states such as [New York](#), [Washington](#), [California](#), and [Illinois](#).

## Key Provisions of SB 599:

The bill with the Dash 1 amendments would amend the Landlord-Tenant Act to provide that, except if otherwise required by a federal program that provides rent subsidies or affordable rents:

1. **Prohibition on Inquiries:** The bill would codify a prohibition on the inquiry about the immigration or citizenship status of applicants, tenants, or their household members. This provision ensures that housing decisions are based on relevant criteria, such as financial responsibility and rental history, rather than status.
2. **Acceptance of Various Forms of Identification:** The bill requires landlords to accept a range of identification forms for identity verification purposes, including Social Security cards, birth certificates, permanent resident cards, visas, Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) cards, passports, driver's licenses, or any combination of identifications that reasonably verify identity.
  - a. This inclusivity acknowledges the diverse backgrounds of Oregon residents and ensures that lack of specific documentation does not become a barrier to housing. This list is based on the list of documents that has been in effect since 2019 in the Portland ordinance and is designed to allow the landlord to verify identity and conduct background checks as in their normal course of business. (*See CoreLogic Myth-Busting: Screening Applicants without a Social Security Number or Driver License document in OLIS*)
  - b. A corollary benefit is increased privacy protection for tenants concerned about identity theft, who may not want to provide social security num. (see <https://rentprep.com/blog/tenant-screening-news/tenant-screening-without-social-security-number/>)
3. **Prohibition on Disclosures:** Disclosures regarding immigration or citizenship status would be prohibited if done with the intent to harass, retaliate, or intimidate. This provision ensures protection for tenants from the risk of intentional manipulation or abuse through the threat of disclosure of private information.
4. **Protection from Discrimination:** This provision prohibits discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived citizenship or immigration status and is in alignment with the broader goal of ensuring access to fair housing for all Oregonians.
5. **Remedy for Violation:** Violation of these provisions would be consistent with those applicable to Fair Housing Act violations, pursuant to ORS 90.390 and ORS 659A.885.



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The Dash-One amendments posted in OLIS ensure that the bill accomplishes the above purposes and can be summarized as follows:

1. **Technical amendments to internally align terms** - for example, the bill should refer to “immigration or citizenship status” rather than one or the other; document definitions should line up with and be consistent with those identified in the Portland ordinance.
2. **Clarification/recognition that federal law pre-empts state laws** - some landlords administering or adhering to federally subsidized housing benefits must inquire about or disclose or discriminate based on immigration or citizenship status;
3. **Narrowing of the prohibition on disclosures**, so they would apply only to disclosures with the intent to intimidate, harass, or retaliate;
4. **Removing the fair housing act amendment** so that we are not adding an entire protected class to the FHA, which would create potential federal lending issues, and instead providing a **discrimination protection within the landlord tenant act** applicable to rental housing, with remedies that mirror FHA remedies.

SB 599 with its pending amendments would close a critical gap in our current statutes. The bill would codify best practices already in place with many landlords, and reinforce Oregon’s commitment to fair housing practices and equal opportunity for all residents, regardless of status. Passage of SB 599 will promote community stability, reflect Oregon’s long standing values of inclusivity, equity, and justice, and deliver an important message to vulnerable communities.

For all of these reasons, we urge your support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.