



March 25, 2025

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for SB 51-1 and -2

Dear Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

I write to you on behalf of Home Forward in support of SB 51 with the -1 and -2 amendments. This bill provides comprehensive and critical support for the preservation of existing affordable housing.

Home Forward is the Public Housing Authority (PHA) for Multnomah County and the largest provider of affordable housing in the state of Oregon. We serve approximately 18,000 low-income households by providing affordable housing, administering rent assistance, and providing supportive services. We own over 7,200 affordable homes throughout Multnomah County and provide households with services which range from housing stability supports to health and wellness. Meanwhile, we fund rent assistance for over 12,000 households each month. Home Forward's mission is to create a better community by providing housing stability through affordable housing development, housing choice expansion, services that support quality of life, and advocacy to improve local and national housing systems.

-1 Amendments

This amendment recognizes the important function of OHCS to collect, analyze and address the ongoing preservation needs of affordable housing in our state by establishing an Affordable Housing Preservation Program. This program is vital for coordinating preservation efforts and providing necessary incentives to protect existing affordable housing, including publicly supported housing and manufactured dwelling parks.

For this program to have the needed impact, it is imperative that the Legislature provide sufficient bond funding to prevent a loss of affordable housing units to the market. In the next five years, 3,850 homes across 65 properties are slated to lose their affordability restrictions unless we act. I ask that the Legislature dedicate at least \$285M in bond funds for the 2025-2027 biennium to preservation – along with passing SB 51 to establish the framework for those funds to be spent to preserve these affordable units and prevent the displacement and potential homelessness of the low-income residents that reside in these homes.

-2 Amendments

Currently, affordable housing providers are experiencing unprecedented increases in operating costs that are directly impacting the long-term sustainability and viability of many affordable housing homes

throughout our state. The combination of high inflation, escalation in insurance costs, increased utility costs, and increased acuties of residents have dramatically changed the operating environment for affordable housing. Costs to operate housing have grown exponentially faster than the permissible increases in restricted rents, resulting in operating deficits at many communities.

At Home Forward, we have identified 15 properties that currently do not meet funders' requirements and are draining significant resources that could be better spent more directly supporting our residents. Unlike a private landlord who may increase rent to address increased operating costs, we know that raising rent is contrary to our mission of advancing housing stability when many of our residents struggle to pay their income restricted rent. Because of these challenges, Home Forward, like many other affordable housing providers, have spent millions of our own funds to support the ongoing operation of our properties, or more importantly stated, our residents' homes.

The proposed -2 amendments provide urgently needed resources and support for property management and asset management by directing OHCS to contract with the Housing Development Center, Inc., to implement critical measures designed to address the current operational challenges including:

- Improving occupancy rates and reducing turnover by providing training, resources, and capacity-building for property management operations in affordable housing projects.
- Issuing grants to nonprofit organizations, federally recognized Indian tribes, local governments, and housing authorities to support property management staffing and operations at specific affordable housing projects.
- Expanding culturally responsive property management services, ensuring that residents receive equitable and tailored support.
- Providing asset management training to organizations that own or operate affordable housing projects, equipping them with the skills needed for long-term financial and operational sustainability.

By prioritizing both property management improvements, asset management improvements, and culturally responsive services, SB 51-2 will contribute to the long-term success and well-being of low-income residents, while strengthening the capacity of local affordable housing providers.

I urge you to pass SB 51 with the -1 and -2 amendments. Thank you for the opportunity to offer support. Please contact me at (503) 348-1196 or christina.dirks@homeforward.org regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christina Dirks', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christina Dirks
Director of Policy and Planning