

March 5, 2025

Chair Nathanson, Vice Chairs Reschke and Walters and members of the committee.

My name is Stephanie Hooper. I represent AGE+, a statewide nonprofit that empowers communities of all ages to value and care for older adults and their support networks. We do this through sharing our expertise in the field of aging, innovative program development, and advocating for sound strategies to guide Oregon through an unprecedented shift in our demographics. We are also a housing developer of accessible, affordable housing for older adults in rural counties. I am here in support of HB 3589 with its amendment.

The legislature's historic and generous investments in affordable housing production have left older adults and people with disabilities behind. Prior to 2024, the scoring of funding proposals awarded extra points to housing projects with multiple bedroom units to house as many families as possible. This wasn't wrong, but the unintended consequence has resulted in a severe deficit in the production of 1 bedroom or single room units best suited to older adult populations. Hence the waitlists LeadingAge Oregon just referenced.

Last year, AGE+ opened 24 units in Madras, 22 units in Talent and began construction on another 26 units also in Talent. These units are all for people at 60% AMI and 55 or older. The goal of our projects has been to demonstrate; a modular construction approach, that smaller projects in rural areas can work financially, and that building 100% of our units to be accessible, with universal design principles, was not cost-prohibitive. We've succeeded in all three.

Our units are in high demand and residents have found safety, belonging and community. In Talent, 4 residents were homeless, living in their car, campers or hotels. In Madras, many of our residents were previously sharing a bedroom with family members, were in RVs or temporary hotels – one woman lived in a shack in a field without running water. None of these situations were sustainable or healthy. On move-in day in Madras, I got to meet Robert. Robert was just getting back on his feet. He needed support after a stroke and slept on his brother and sister-in law's couch for the last year. He couldn't believe there was a place like this and his rental application was accepted. As we helped him move in, he just looked around in awe; he now had a home and said, "this is the nicest place I've ever lived".

The AGE+ projects are a drop in the bucket in terms of meeting the shortage of suitable affordable housing stock for our current and future demographics. We need **more** developers producing senior housing projects. This means creating dedicated funding streams for age- friendly projects and technical assistance with accessibility design which are the aims of HB 3589. Without an intentional initiative, there is no incentive for developers to build affordable housing that is useful for all ages, stages and abilities.

We must do better to meet the housing needs of older Oregonians. I urge you to advance HB 3589.