

Written Testimony in Support of SB 5531 – Tillamook Bay Commons Workforce Housing Project

Good afternoon Co-Chairs and members of the committee,

My name is Briar Smith, and I serve as a member of the Tillamook County Housing Commission. I write today in strong support of SB 5531, which would provide essential funding to advance the Tillamook Bay Commons workforce housing project—a development that is absolutely critical to addressing our region’s most urgent housing needs.

As a Housing Commissioner and Executive Director of Tillamook County Habitat for Humanity, I’ve had a front-row seat to the challenges our county faces in developing and sustaining adequate housing for our workforce. For the third consecutive triennium, our Community Health Needs Assessment has identified the lack of housing as the number one factor influencing health outcomes in Tillamook County. With vacancy rates as low as 1% and a local economy heavily driven by tourism, the demand for workforce-oriented housing has never been greater—nor the gap more severe.

Despite meaningful progress in affordable housing, workforce housing presents unique and persistent challenges. Environmental restrictions, outdated zoning codes, and limited infrastructure in our rural, coastal region make these developments exceptionally difficult to deliver. Meanwhile, rising market rates have rendered housing unaffordable for many essential workers—including educators, healthcare professionals, and service industry employees. These barriers not only impact individual families—they actively undermine the strength and resilience of our local economy.

The Tillamook Bay Commons project offers a rare and timely opportunity to change this trajectory. Maker Development Studios has demonstrated exceptional commitment to the project by forming a nonprofit entity and securing pre-leasing commitments from major employers, including Adventist Health Tillamook. They have leveraged every available resource to bring this project to the brink of construction. What remains is the critical funding gap that SB 5531 is uniquely positioned to fill.

With bond financing already secured, the funds included in this bill are the final piece needed to move this shovel-ready project forward. It enjoys broad community and employer support and has the potential to serve as a replicable model for other rural communities facing similar workforce housing crises.

Tillamook County has long demonstrated leadership in developing collaborative, community-centered housing solutions. Passage of SB 5531 will ensure that these efforts finally translate into meaningful, on-the-ground results.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge your support of SB 5531.

Sincerely,

Briar Smith

Tillamook County Housing Commissioner

Executive Director Tillamook Habitat for Humanity