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Testimony in Support of HB 2639  
Human Services and Housing Committee – March 6, 2013  
Submitted by: John Miller, Oregon Opportunity Network

Chair Tomei, Vice-Chair Gomberg, and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Opportunity Network (Oregon ON) respectfully submits this written testimony in support of HB 2639. This bill would give tenants a fair chance by removing barriers for tenants with Housing Choice vouchers (also known as Section 8 vouchers) to rent housing in their preferred communities, while still protecting landlords. It is only fair that tenants get the opportunity to be considered by a landlord for units, rather than be turned away because of their voucher. With this bill, all parties – tenants, landlords, and housing authorities – have come to the table to negotiate a workable solution that will strengthen and improve the Section 8 program.

Oregon ON members in communities throughout Oregon work to increase housing access and opportunities to build better lives. HB 2639 would help remove barriers to finding a place to call home.

This bill will help to open the door to thousands of tenants seeking stable housing. Our members often work with families struggling to use rent assistance, and the first barrier they face is landlords unwilling to even accept their application. HB 2639 would give them the opportunity to present their application and be screened on their merits. We know that families succeed when they can find housing close to work or school, near family or church, in walk-able neighborhoods or with good transit. When their choices are limited, the likelihood of stability is diminished.

Many of our members also are landlords who would be subject to the requirements of this bill. Our members know that having Section 8 helps tenants succeed in their housing, and it also helps our members succeed as a housing provider. Our members also have had experience with Risk Mitigation pools, and find this to be a valuable tool.

Another very important part of the bill is the Stable Rental Housing Program that would provide modest amounts of rental assistance to prevent homelessness before it begins or shorten the length of homelessness and return families to stable housing. The Stable Rental Housing Program can be an important new funding source to increase the number of families served in Oregon. When families come to homeless shelters, they have accumulated debts and barriers to housing, and experienced trauma that ripples through many state-funded systems, and it can cost more than \$10,000 per household to serve them. When we can prevent their homelessness at an average of \$3,000 for financial assistance and case management, we have made a wise investment--this is what the Stable Rental Housing Program offers.

On behalf of our members statewide, we urge you to support HB 2639. Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this important bill.