



**Testimony of Becky Straus, Legislative Director  
In Support of HB 2639  
House Committee on Human Services and Housing  
March 6, 2013**

Chair Tomei and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of HB 2639.

As you know, the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU) advocates in the Legislature and in the courts to protect the fundamental civil liberties granted to us under the U.S. Constitution and the Oregon Constitution. We fight vigorously against any attempts to undermine these rights and, on welcome occasions such as those provided by HB 2639, we support efforts to clarify and advance them.

HB 2639 is an important adjustment to the law that promotes equal access to safe and decent housing as well as vibrant and economically diverse communities. In 1997, the Legislature committed to protecting tenants from discrimination by landlords on the basis of a tenant's "source of income," demonstrating to the committee today that this type of equality in housing has been a long-held value in Oregon. It is time for the law to ensure that all types of income are protected and that no tenant will be denied housing on this basis.

For almost forty years the federal government has operated the Section 8 housing voucher program, meant to provide low-income renters an opportunity to reduce reliance on public housing through integration into the private housing market.<sup>1</sup> But the program can only reach these goals if tenants are able to apply their voucher to available housing. A landlord's refusal to accept the voucher is a significant barrier to the effective operation of the program.

Moreover, our acquiescence to these denials invites unlawful discrimination that is hidden by the pretext of decisions based on voucher status. Women-headed households account for 76% of all housing choice vouchers, including Section 8 vouchers.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, people living with disabilities, single female heads of household, families with children, and people of color make up the majority of people who receive rental assistance or other supplemental sources of income from government programs.<sup>3</sup> But of course decisions made on account of membership in any of these groups is prohibited.

HB 2639 takes a fair approach to these issues. Because it advances fundamental principles of equality in Oregon, we strongly support the bill and request that you move it forward with a do pass recommendation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Please feel free to be in touch at any time with any questions or comments you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> 42 U.S.C. 1437f(a)

<sup>2</sup> McMahon, E.J. "Cuomo revives Section 8 "discrimination" issue" <http://www.nytorch.com/?p=6969>

<sup>3</sup> Flagg, Kinara. "Mending the Safety Net through Source of Income Protections: The Nexus between Antidiscrimination and Social Welfare Law." *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 20 *Colum. J. Gender & L.* 201 (2011)