



#### Member Organizations

211 Info

AFSCME Local #3135

Bienestar

CASA of Oregon

Central City Concern

City of Eugene

City of Gresham

City of Portland

City of Tigard

Clackamas County

Clackamas Housing Action Network

Coalition for a Livable Future

Community Action Partnership of Oregon

Community Action Team, Inc.

Community Alliance of Tenants

Community Housing Fund

Community Partners for Affordable Housing

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Enterprise Community Partners

Fair Housing Council of Oregon

Farmworker Housing Development Corp.

Habitat for Humanity of Oregon

Hacienda CDC

Homeless Families Coalition

Housing Advocacy Group of Washington Co.

Housing Development Center

Human Solutions

Impact Northwest

JOIN

Lane County Legal Aid and Advocacy Center

League of Women Voters of Oregon

Lincoln County

Metro

NAYA Family Center

Neighborhood Economic Development Corp.

Neighborhood Partnerships

NeighborWorks Umpqua

Network for Oregon Affordable Housing

Northwest Housing Alternatives

Northwest Pilot Project

Oregon Action

Oregon Food Bank

Oregon Housing Authorities

Oregon Opportunity Network

Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon

Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives,

Inc.

Proud Ground

Raphael House

REACH CDC

Rose CDC

St. Vincent DePaul of Lane County

Shelter Care

Sisters Of The Road

Street Roots

Transition Projects, Inc.

Washington County

Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services

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# HB 2639

## Increase Housing Opportunity through the Housing Choice Voucher

Testimony in Support, March 6, 2013

House Human Services and Housing Committee

### Chair Tomei, Vice Chair Olson, Members of the Committee

I am Janet Byrd, Executive Director of Neighborhood Partnerships, and Convenor of the Housing Alliance. The Housing Alliance is a coalition of organizations from all across Oregon. We represent a wide range of interests including housing providers, social service providers, local jurisdictions and advocacy groups. We come together because we share concern about the critical need for affordable housing in all communities in Oregon. Housing is the foundation of our communities, and safe decent affordable housing opens doors to stability and achievement.

We have previously provided the committee with data about the overwhelming housing needs in all Oregon counties. Data released this week by the National Low Income Housing Coalition is also dramatic. The new data shows that Oregon is at the bottom of the country – fourth from the bottom -- in meeting the housing needs of individuals and families with low incomes. For households with extremely low incomes, it's like twenty people playing a game of musical chairs with only four chairs. But searching for housing that you can afford with enough money left to buy food and groceries is not a game.

Because of this overwhelming need in our communities, the Housing Alliance is pleased to be able to testify in support of House Bill 2639. Section 8 is the largest housing program in the state of Oregon, serving 32,000 households, and bringing almost two hundred million dollars (\$200,000,000) a year into Oregon.

We cannot afford for this system to fail. With resources as tight as they are, we need to know that a tenant who receives a Section 8 voucher will be considered as a tenant and given a chance to apply for vacant apartments. Landlords need to know how the system works, that it will work smoothly, and that they have recourse for damages. Housing authorities need to be able to manage without excessive regulation and to tweak programs to improve success. The system needs to work for tenants, and for landlords, and for housing authorities, and for Oregon communities.

We are excited about the balanced approach that HB 2639 offers. The bill does five things that we believe will improve the system for all parties, and which together promise real improvement.

HB 2639 will require that landlords screen Section 8 voucher holders just as they would any other tenant. It does not require that Section 8 voucher holders be treated differently – rather that they be treated the same.

HB 2639 asks housing authorities to streamline processes for working with landlords, and requires all parties to work to increase the flexibility that housing authorities have to do their work. Waivers of federal regulations will be sought.

HB 2639 will create a risk mitigation pool, a special insurance fund for landlords. We have experience with similar risk mitigation pools already. They are a useful tool and provide assurances to landlords, but do not in fact experience high claims.

HB 2639 will create a Stable Rental Housing Fund to augment the resources available to Oregon communities through Section 8. The Section 8 program does not begin to address the full range of housing needs, and is not a flexible resource. The Stable Rental Housing Fund will provide service providers with another, more flexible tool to address housing needs.

Finally, HB 2639 requires that the parties involved in the Housing Choice voucher program meet regularly to address concerns, solve problems in implementation, and refine the program to better serve Oregon communities.

Negotiation of HB 2639 has been difficult, and many individuals and organizations deserve a lot of credit for staying at the table and working towards a solution. These organizations and their leadership should all be commended for their follow through and patience. Speaker Kotek and local elected officials should also be recognized for their leadership.

I'd also like to acknowledge that we aren't done. HB 2639 is a big first step, but not a final product. The parties will need to continue to meet, and Housing and Community Services has agreed to convene us. We will need to monitor success and make adjustments to improve the system, and I hope that you as a Committee will remain engaged in monitoring our progress and celebrating our successes.

I urge your support of this important legislation.