

AUBRÉ DICKSON GOVERNANCE BILL TESTIMONY AT THE CAPITOL

"Good afternoon, Madame Chair, Members of the Committee. My name is Aubré Dickson, and I am Chair of the Oregon State Housing Council ("SHC"). I have served on the Housing Council since June 2012. I was appointed and confirmed Chair in September 2014 and presided over my first meeting as Chair in November. Established in 1971 by the Oregon Legislature, the State Housing Council is charged with meeting the tremendous need for the provision of affordable housing for lower income Oregonians. Our role, with the advice of the Director of Oregon Housing and Community Services ("OHCS"), is to carry out the provisions of ORS 456.561 (the review and approval of loans, grants and funding awards) and ORS 456.571 (develop policies to aid in stimulating and increasing the supply of housing for persons and families of lower income and advising OHCS, the Governor, Legislative Assembly, other state agencies and local governments concerning local, state and federal legislation or rules that affect the cost and supply of housing).

I joined the Council mainly for two reasons; and it is because of these two reasons I am uniquely qualified to serve in my capacity as Chair: (1) as a practitioner in the affordable housing industry, I wanted the opportunity to play a greater role in shaping the direction of affordable housing finance by using my expertise to help address and provide solutions for the lack of affordable housing and the struggle to end homelessness in Oregon; and (2) probably more importantly, I am a first generation Oregonian that happens to be a product of the very housing OHCS and SHC have worked diligently to provide and preserve throughout the State of Oregon. Had it not been for the federal, state and local programs that assist low income families obtain safe, decent, affordable housing, my single mother of two would not have been able to afford a decent place to raise her sons; I would not be sitting before you today. It is because of my passion, conviction, and personal testimony for housing choice and opportunity; the fact that I am an example of what this very housing can provide, I can credibly rebut the negative stigma and perception about not only the dwellings, but the people that reside in the units. It is my eternal belief the work that OHCS does gives low income individuals and families hope and faith that with a hand up (not a hand out), they can succeed, and it all starts with having a quality place to call home.

This is why the work of the SHC is so vitally important. The Council is actively working to understand both its current and proposed responsibilities, as well as to work more collaboratively with other advisory bodies, such as CAPO (Community Action Partnership of Oregon). Michael Fieldman, CAPO member and fellow Councilmember, is present and will share supporting remarks on behalf of CAPO shortly.

We recently had a joint SHC and CAPO meeting in January to discuss the state of homelessness in Oregon, and ask questions that begin to shape and formalize ideas for the application of the Governor's proposed \$100MM homeless families initiative. There are plans to hold several more of these joint meetings this spring.

This leads me to the purpose of why we are here today and that is to testify in support of the proposed Governance Bill, HB 2442. The goal of HB 2442 is to give the Council (if passed, newly named the “Housing Stability Council”) greater authority in Agency oversight, particularly as it pertains to providing policy direction across all agency programs and play a more active role in fiscal management by overseeing the financial budgeting process, as well as greater levels of engagement in the issues so pressing across all areas of the State. The name change is symbolic; it is a better representation of the overarching mission and vision of both OHCS and HSC – and that is to not just provide housing, but housing stability, which is not possible without the wrap around services provided by service organizations such as Community Action Agencies, Coordinated Care Organizations, and other local agencies. For it is these programs that allow individuals and families to improve their physical, social and financial well-being – in alignment with the Governor’s Healthy People program area - with the goal of progression through the housing continuum (from low income housing, to market rate, to eventually homeownership).

The proposed changes will also inject a spirit of collaboration and thrive on the collective efforts across state government to achieve the interconnected policy objectives and state priorities.

There are many issues posing challenges to the development of affordable housing throughout many communities, some of which were touched on earlier: lack of supply, land costs, increasing cost of building materials that are driving up the price of construction, and as we are all keenly aware, the lack of soft funding to help reduce project debt, in effect subsidizing rents by making projects affordable to very low income households. These are but a snapshot of some of the issues OHCS, SHC, CAPO, and Oregon ON grapple with, necessitating greater efforts to work together alongside Regional Solutions Teams to brainstorm creative solutions to eradicate poverty and end homelessness.

To this end, in closing, the Council believes the proposed changes will lead to:

- o A more effective and engaged Council
- o Better oversight and direction for the Agency
- o More engagement with partners

Thank you

Aubré Dickson, Oregon State Housing Council Chair