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April 6, 2015

Good afternoon Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the Human Services and Housing Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding HB 2547. My name is John Miller and I am here representing Oregon Opportunity Network, the statewide association of affordable housing and community development nonprofits.

Oregon ON's board recently added HB 2547 to our priority agenda with an *oppose* position, based on our concerns about the bill both as originally written and as amended.

The bill as amended moves in the right direction by removing the original version's sweeping imposition of a new layer of regulation, and by charging a workgroup with developing recommendations and coming back to you in 2016. However, we strongly oppose the amended version's imposition of a moratorium on any new housing projects that includes innovative linkages with the health system.

Seeking better integration of healthcare with housing is a statewide policy goal, and for good reason: it makes better use of limited public resources, it reduces healthcare costs, and it improves health outcomes and peoples' lives. Now is not the time to move Oregon backward from the promising health and housing integration for which we are rapidly becoming a national model.

Our members, as nonprofits providing affordable housing, have always provided health and wellness programs as part of the resident services in their buildings – everything from foot care for seniors, to on-site clinics, to exercise and nutrition classes, to helping folks access insurance coverage and navigate their health care options. These services are entirely voluntary and are not in any way shape or form, an assisted living medical model. Rather they are programs that, particularly when linked directly with partners in the health care system, make better use of public dollars, improve access for low-income residents, and make people's lives healthier and better. Rachael Duke from Home Forward will share a couple examples with you in a moment.

Several of our members and partners are serving on the stakeholder workgroup convened by DHS to study the housing with services model, including HUD Field Office Director Margaret Salazar, as well as Oregon ON members Amanda Saul from Enterprise, Dan Valliere from REACH, and Rachael Duke from Home Forward.

We believe that an open, comprehensive conversation among diverse stakeholders in the workgroup is the best way to build shared understanding and to explore whether new regulation is needed around the housing with services model, and if so what that might be.

We respectfully ask that you direct DHS to give the workgroup a clearly defined charge, including establishment of a clear, shared understanding of the “Housing with Services” model as well as health-related resident services provided in affordable housing, and that it report back to the Legislature prior to the 2016 session with any recommendations around regulatory or statutory changes that might be needed. We note that this could take place through this committee’s direction, without any legislative action. As long as the workgroup has a clear charge and goals, with the right people at the table, good facilitation, and a deadline, we feel confident that it can bring back thoughtful recommendations for your consideration in the next session. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

Please direct the DHS workgroup to study and address the concerns that have been raised, while shelving this harmful bill. Thank you very much.