



Rachael Duke, Supportive Housing Program Director, Home Forward
Testimony before the Human Services and Housing Committee
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Greetings Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the Human Services and Housing Committee.

My name is Rachael Duke and I am the Supportive Housing Program Director at Home Forward, the housing authority that serves Multnomah County and the state's largest provider of affordable housing. We provide housing assistance for 15,000 households and over 33,000 residents. This includes more than 9000 rent assistance vouchers, such as Section 8, as well as 6,200 housing units – public housing and other affordable housing that we develop and acquire. All of this portfolio has the potential to be impacted by today's conversation about HB 2547.

Since 1979, Home Forward has linked with community-based health services as well as other important community resources so that we can successfully house Multnomah County residents who need low-income housing. Not everyone needs access to services to be stably housed, but many of us do need more than just a roof over our heads. At Home Forward, we are landlords and housing managers; we need to rely on community-based services to provide the additional support that some of our residents need.

For 35 years, Home Forward has linked arms with service providers to support residents. In 1979 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded Home Forward its first Congregate Housing Services Program grant, established in partnership with the OHSU School of Nursing, the Visiting Nurses Association, Friendly House and Loaves & Fishes. The program focused on supporting low-income seniors who were most at risk of being institutionalized.

Since that time Home Forward has looked for additional partnerships and resources to support residents who have health needs, including needs connected to aging, as well as programs focused on kids and economic opportunity supports for households who can someday leave subsidized housing successfully. We do not provide services directly – we have services staff that focus their efforts on connecting our residents with community resources.

One current example is a high-rise in Northeast Portland, Hollywood East. This high-rise has long worked with various service agencies and in partnership with agencies committing to support residents, we reduce screening criteria and open our doors as wide as we can. Hollywood East is one of four Home Forward communities that participates in the Housing with Services project with Cedar Sinai. This brings a few hours a week of health care navigation to the building, allowing our resident services coordinator, already

supporting 300 people in that building, to turn that kind of work over to someone else more connected to the health care industry. What this means, on a personal and operational level, is that one of our residents who was struggling to access his diabetes medication is now able to get insulin and the equipment he needs. This program also brings access to a mental health provider from a local mental health agency. This allows residents who have been struggling with depression or other mental health issues but who have not connected to services to successfully access treatment.

Another even more dramatic example of connecting our residents to health care resources is the Apartments at Bud Clark Commons. This is a 130-unit apartment building focused on housing the most vulnerable homeless people in Portland. Partnerships with local health care clinics and on-site mental health services make it possible for some people who have lived outside longer than a decade to find a way to live inside. There are multiple benefits to this kind of program, but a dramatic one is that the cost to Medicaid alone decreased by an average of almost 50% per person for folks during their first year inside with the help of these services.

Our goal at Home Forward is for our residents to be successful and to have good lives with dignity and the support they need. We partner with community-based services to achieve that goal. As a participant in the DHS workgroup, we want to have a conversation that asks how do we achieve even more partnerships and opportunities that benefit our residents? How can we make their lives even better? We believe a planful and thoughtful discussion on increasing resources that are so badly needed is the best way to move forward and as a result, do not support the bill as it is currently drafted.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak.