

# OREGON LAW CENTER

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**Testimony in Support of Affordable Family Housing Development Program  
in the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department**

**HB 2198**

**Housing and Human Services Committee**

**Submitted By: Sybil Hebb**

**April 20th, 2015**

**Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chairs Piluso and Stark, and Members of the Committee,**

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the amendments to HB 2198 to establish the Affordable Family Housing Development Program to support critically necessary new affordable housing for low-income families in our communities.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low income communities by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. One of the most important issues in the lives of our clients is the challenge to find safe, stable, and affordable housing. Safe and stable housing is a basic human need. Housing is about much more than a roof over one's head; it is about opportunity. Without safe and stable housing, it is difficult or impossible for low-income families to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy.

There is simply not enough affordable housing in our state to meet the needs of low-income Oregonians. In a growing number of communities, vacancy rates are lower than 1%. This makes it virtually impossible not only to find housing in a new community, but to leave housing that is unsafe or in bad repair. Affordable housing is disproportionately difficult to find and maintain for minority communities, single women with children, and people with disabilities.

This housing crisis also has a particularly serious impact on victims of domestic and sexual violence and their children. Without access to safe and affordable housing, victims are at greater risk of heightened abuse or homelessness. Many domestic and sexual violence shelters are unable to house families longer than 30 days. The average length of time it takes a homeless family to secure housing is 6-10 months. Victims in our communities often face the terrible choice between homelessness and returning to unsafe homes, risking further violence for themselves and their children regardless of their choice.

Safe shelter and housing create opportunity, and are keys to breaking the cycle of poverty and violence. When victims have safety and stability, they can begin to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children. When children have a stable place to call home, their educational and psychological development can continue without impediment. The creation of permanent affordable housing resources in our communities can save lives, and futures.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support of the proposed \$100 million investment in new permanent housing resources, so that we can provide parents and their children a safe place to call home.

Thank you for your service, and for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critically important issue.