



May 5, 2015

Dear Chair Gelser and Members of the Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share our support for HB 2442, as amended. As background, throughout 2013 we at Oregon Opportunity Network, the statewide association of affordable housing and community development nonprofits, partnered closely with Oregon Housing and Community Services in their process exploring redesign of the agency. Oregon ON and our members developed guiding principles, convened stakeholder focus groups and a daylong summit, participated on subject area workgroups and helped inform OHCS Director Margaret Van Vliet's eventual recommendations to the Legislature around program changes and governance to the agency.

During this process Oregon ON focused in particular on the need to establish as part of the redesign, a new housing commission or council that would have a strong and effective role in setting state housing policy. We know that housing is a key determinant of health and prosperity. To meet our shared goals for the prosperity of Oregonians, housing must become better integrated with statewide policy and housing must be recognized as absolutely fundamental to achieving our goals around healthcare, education, and economic development.

We're very excited by the positive changes that have occurred at the agency under the strong leadership of Director Van Vliet. We are thrilled that Governor Brown has made affordable housing a priority in her administration, including the proposal to invest \$100 million in bonds for housing. And, we deeply appreciate that legislators across the political spectrum are working to address the acute housing needs in all parts of this state – knowing that to succeed, you need a place to call home.

Given the critical importance of establishing a new, stronger governance and policy direction for housing, Oregon ON and other partners worked closely with OHCS staff to come up with a bill that updates and strengthens statute to establish a new Housing Stability Council – that bill is now before you as HB 2442-A.

To be effective, we believe the state's housing stability council should have the following attributes:

- The authority to set housing and community services policy for the state, with a clear linkage to other state agencies and systems.
- Policies based on shared outcomes and focused on how programs help low-income Oregonians become stable, successful and healthy.
- Fiduciary responsibility for the agency's entrepreneurial business model, including a role in developing and monitoring the budget.
- Expertise across the continuum from homelessness to homeownership.

With a strengthened housing council and agency, and with the oversight and engagement of the Legislature and community partners, we can set common-sense policy and make the best, most effective use of public resources in order to create stronger and more prosperous families and communities across the state. Thank you.

Sincerely,

John Miller
Executive Director