

OREGON LAW CENTER

522 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 812
Portland, Or. 97204
(503) 295-2760

**Testimony in Support of Affordable Family Housing Development Program
in the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department
HB 2198-2
House Rules Committee
Submitted By: Sybil Hebb
May 18th, 2015**

Chair Hoyle, Vice-Chairs Gilliam and Smith-Warner, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2198-2 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. Housing 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.

In a growing number of communities, vacancy rates are lower than 1%. This makes it virtually impossible to find housing in a new community, or 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 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. 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. A victim advocate in central Oregon recently explained the barriers that survivors faced when trying to escape dangerous environments at home:

"Recently I had a victim come to my office in desperate need of housing for her and her 6 kids. When I told her about the length of the waiting list and the price of other rentals, she knew instantly that she couldn't make it work. She had to make the difficult choice between returning to her abuser or being homeless. Victims of domestic violence should never have to make this choice."

Safe shelter and housing create opportunity, and are keys to breaking the cycle of poverty and violence. 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.

Oregon has an opportunity to create greater safety for survivors, families, and communities. 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.