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Testimony in Support of House Bill 4079

Chair Clem, Members of the Committee: My name is Bill Hall. I am chair of the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners, First Vice President of the Oregon Association of Counties, and I appreciate this opportunity to appear in support of House Bill 4079. The League of Oregon Cities has endorsed this measure, and A-O-C's special operations committee will consider it this afternoon.

Oregon's housing crisis is real, and while I am not usually given to apocalyptic pronouncements, it is getting worse by the day. For more than a decade, I have been hearing from employers in all parts of Lincoln County that housing quality, affordability and availability represents a significant barrier to employee recruitment and retention. This applies at almost every income level, since our countywide rental vacancy rate is now zero-point-seven percent. Or, as someone in the rental industry told me, that's about enough time for someone to come in, vacuum the carpets, wipe down the fixtures, and let the next tenant move in.



I spoke to the C-E-O of the Lincoln City hospital last week. A decade ago, her predecessor told me he had nurses commuting from the Valley due to housing issues. Today, that's still the case. I am chair of the board of the non-profit family homeless shelter in Newport. I sat in on some of the organizational meetings for that shelter back in 1988. The founders imagined they would be serving families in crisis. They never imagined they would be dealing with families like the one who showed up to put in an application last week. Mom and dad are both working and have saved a nest egg for move in costs. But they are living out of their van because they literally can find no place to work.

Stories like these can be found in almost every corner of our state. Oregon is a big, wonderful, diverse place—almost four million people spread across 98-thousand square miles. The message I keep trying to get across when I talk about tackling our housing crisis is that we need a large toolbox that includes many tools. What works in Portland might not work in Pendleton. A great solution in Lincoln City might not be the best approach for Grants Pass.

We need more public investment in housing, but even in an ideal world, public agencies and non-profits don't have the capacity to get the job done by themselves. We have to creative incentives and remove barriers to private investment as well. To me, this pilot project will not harm the important core objectives of the Oregon Land Use system—protecting resource lands and containing sprawl—while still making it possible to try an approach that might make it easier for a nurse to live closer to the patients he or she cares for.

