



**Testimony in Support of HB 4079**  
**Before the House Committee On Rural Communities, Land Use and Water**  
**Submitted by Sybil Hebb**  
**February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

Chair Clem, Vice-Chairs Helm and Post, 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 4079, directing the Land Conservation and Development Commission and the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department to establish and implement an affordable housing pilot program.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. The vast majority of our clients have incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and struggle to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their families. Legal aid offices throughout the state have indicated that one of the most important issues in the lives of our clients is the challenge to find and maintain safe, stable, and affordable housing. Housing is about much more than a roof over one's head; it is about opportunity, stability, and health. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible for families to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy.

The evidence is clear that Oregon is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. For multiple years in a row, Oregon has led the nation in numbers of people moving into the state. This comes on the heels of several years of reduced construction starts as a result of the recession and the foreclosure crisis. As a result, we now have some of the lowest rental vacancy rates in the nation. This is a crisis across the state. Portland recently had a vacancy rate of under 3%, but it's as bad or worse in many rural areas. The Southern Oregon Rental Owners Association November 2015 newsletter reports vacancy rates below 3 percent in Southern Oregon. The vacancy rate is still hovering around 1% in Bend, and a December 2015 Oregonian article reports vacancy rates of under 1% on the Coast. Homelessness is a real risk for families who cannot find affordable housing in our communities.

Our current housing crisis demands multi-faceted solutions. We need immediate protections, such as support for emergency shelters and protections for renters in crisis. But we must also take longer-term steps to encourage the construction and preservation of more affordable housing stock. We must think creatively about ways to give local government the tools they need to address their local needs, while also protecting the integrity of our urban and rural lands. HB 4079 strikes that balance and is a creative and reasonable proposal designed to help the state consider the viability of new tools for affordable housing.

HB 4079 will authorize two pilot projects outside the Portland metro area, allowing a willing local government to develop affordable housing adjacent to the urban growth boundary. The bill with its expected amendments provides important and reasonable sidebars to ensure that the new housing is responsive to the needs of identified low-income populations in the community, and is near important public services, transit, and facilities. The pilot project housing must be housing that would not otherwise be provided without the pilot program. And the bill requires that the project minimize or avoid adverse effects on natural resources and nearby farm and forest uses, if the pilot project would require amending an urban growth boundary to include the pilot project site.

Of particular interest is the bill's recognition of the special crisis that many manufactured home park owners face during this housing crisis. Manufactured home parks are Oregon's largest source of affordable housing. Due to the increases in land prices, parks are at risk of closure and conversion to alternate uses. Residents of manufactured home parks usually own their homes, and rent the land beneath the home. When a park is closed, residents often have difficulty moving their homes. The state took steps in previous sessions to provide financial assistance to residents who are forced to move their homes, but due to the unavailability of land for new manufactured home parks, there is often no place to go with the home. The bill recognizes this dilemma and calls out manufactured home parks as one type of use to be considered for the proposed pilot projects.

Passage of HB 4079 will not solve all of Oregon's affordable housing needs, but it would provide a critically important opportunity to examine a new approach in the creation of desperately needed new affordable housing in our communities. For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.