



Oregon's Poverty Fighting Network

February 16, 2017

To: Representative David Gomberg
Rep.DavidGomberg@state.or.us

Representative Gene Whisnant
Rep.GeneWhisnant@Oregonlegislature.gov

Representative Brad Witt
Rep.BradWitt@Oregonlegislature.gov

Dear Representatives Gomberg, Whisnant and Witt:

At its February meeting, the Community Action executive directors from around the state, voted to support Legislative Concept 3656. Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO) brings a unique perspective to statewide issues because members of the partnership represents the needs and aspirations of all of the communities across the state. These 18 agencies are in the forefront of assisting Oregon's homeless individuals and families. Many of our agencies have devoted their staffing and balance sheets to the fight for affordable housing by acting to develop new affordable housing, and preserve existing affordable housing. Energy assistance and low-income weatherization are two other resources we have brought to this effort.

The needs of the communities we serve in every region of Oregon, is the foundation for CAPO's support for LC 3656. One of these needs is simply for a larger housing stock, regardless of its affordability. Many of our homeless assistance programs are unable to serve even 10% of the families that ask for help, yet have to send unspent resources back to the federal government because there is simply no available housing in which to place the homeless families. We need more affordable housing, but, more simply, we just need more housing.

Oregon has approximately 1.7 million housing units. Of these units, 1,080,625, or 64% single-family homes. A significant fraction of these homes are occupied by low-income families and seniors. This is true across the state but rural areas have even higher homeownership rates – 70-80%, with a large fraction of these homeowners in actual poverty. Included in that category are probably the majority of the 140,000 “mobile homes” the census records as in use in Oregon.

These hundreds of thousands of single-family units occupied by low-income families have nearly dropped off everyone's radar. Currently, state commitment to the repair and preservation of these units is only \$1.5 million of pass through federal CDBG funds. That approximately equals the cost of six new affordable housing units. Yet repair and preservation of these affordable low income family units ranges from \$5,000 to \$35,000. In its focus on new units, Oregon appears to have forgotten that preservation is as important and far cheaper.

The perfect example of this loss of perspective appears in the Weatherization programs managed by our Community Action agencies. In the past, local staff working with needy homeowners could use discretion to prioritize emergency repairs intended to preserve the units and the energy conservation measures in them. In the simplest example, our staff could put a rubber roof on an old mobile home as a

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means to preserve both the affordable very low-income unit's installed insulation along with the surrounding structure. In an effort to claim every possible kilowatt-hour of savings, that option is now gone. Nowhere in these "energy saving" calculations is there provision to include the carbon footprint and high energy cost of creating a new unit to replace one we simply watched melt in Oregon's hostile climate.

We in the Community Action system agree with Speaker Kotek that the state must construct 100,000 new units in Oregon. As soon as possible. However, just like our household budgets, we must track expenditures (losses) as well as incoming gains. As noted in the white paper supporting LC 3656, attached, preservation of existing units is very economical, much greener and will help us more efficiently and quickly achieve a net 100,000-unit increase.

Sincerely,



Janet Merrell
Executive Director



Donna Bowman
CAPO Board President and
Executive Director
Klamath Lake Community Action Services

Copies to: Ryan Fisher, Northwest Public Affairs
Shannon Vilhauer, Habitat for Humanity
Alison McIntosh, Housing Alliance
Elise Brown, OregonOn



Community Action Partnership of Oregon increases resources and opportunities to ensure that all Oregonians thrive.