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Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources

To our esteemed Committee members:

I am writing to you today to urge you to pass SB 114 and/or SB 258 out of your Committee with a “do pass” recommendation. As you know, these bills both reverse the effects of SB 1573, which was hurriedly passed in the 2016 Legislative short session.

Many people will argue that SB 1573 violates the Oregon Constitution, and I wholeheartedly agree with that opinion. SB 1573 should be reversed for this reason alone.

However, I would like to focus my testimony on the pretense upon which SB 1573 was sold to the Legislature.

SB 1573, which strips Oregon citizens of their right to vote on annexations, was included as part of a four bill package ostensibly intended to address the lack of affordable housing in Oregon. Voting on annexations has NOTHING to do with the availability of affordable housing. I submit the cities of Portland and Bend as examples for your consideration. I believe there is almost universal agreement that these two cities face a shortage of affordable housing. However, neither of these cities allows citizens to vote on annexations. It is evident that factors other than citizens’ ability to vote on annexations dominate the availability of affordable housing.

Indeed, I would argue to you that allowing citizens to have the final say on how and where their towns grow actually reduces infrastructure costs, and therefore the costs of housing in those towns. Providing infrastructure to new developments is incredibly expensive, whereas promoting infill and efficient use of land already within the city limits allows existing infrastructure to be utilized, reducing the costs of both development and use of city facilities.

I would like to give you an example of the impact of this misguided bill on one small community in Oregon.

I have lived in the North Plains area for almost 25 years. North Plains is a small town located about 22 miles west of Portland. It has a population of about 2000. For many years, North Plains has grown slowly and carefully as a result of its citizens’ desire to preserve their quality of life, which they have been able to assert by virtue of them giving

themselves the right to have the final word on how their community grows by requiring citizen approval of all discretionary annexations.

However, Since SB 1573 was passed last year, greedy developers (the citizens of North Plains know very well who they are), who have heretofore been held in check by North Plains' citizens, have rushed to begin large developments which will quickly and vastly increase the size of this small town, adding over 600 new homes. Using the generally-accepted average of about 2.2 residents/dwelling, these new developments will immediately add MORE THAN 1300 NEW RESIDENTS, A TWO THIRDS INCREASE IN POPULATION.

The vast majority (if not all) of these houses will be single-family dwellings. These houses will not be "affordable housing" by any stretch of the imagination.

SB 1573 should not have been part of the affordable housing package, and the fact that there are not just one, but TWO bills that seek to reverse SB 1573 is testament to how badly SB 114 and/or SB 258 need to be passed.

I urge you to pass SB 114 and/or SB 258 out of your Committee with a "do pass" recommendation.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this matter.

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