



May 9, 2017

Committee on Revenue
Oregon State House of Representatives
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Testimony in support of SB 311 – authorizing cities and counties to establish seismic retrofitting property tax exemption programs

On behalf of the statewide membership of Restore Oregon, I am writing to endorse and encourage passage of SB 311 which would provide a much-needed financial impetus for property owners to invest in the seismic retrofitting of unreinforced masonry buildings (URMs).

Restore Oregon is a non-profit organization that works statewide to preserve, reuse, and pass forward the historic places that make our communities so livable and sustainable. We have studied this issue extensively and published a Special Report in 2013 titled **“Resilient Masonry Buildings – Saving Lives, Livelihoods, and the Livability of Oregon’s Historic Downtowns”** that called for financial incentives such as this.

I can testify to the fact that the high cost of seismic retrofitting is a major obstacle to the restoration of historic buildings across Oregon, from rural Main Streets to downtown Portland. We have heard from scores of property owners frustrated by their inability to afford seismic upgrades triggered by the rehab and reuse of an otherwise viable historic structure.

Here are some data points to support your vote for SB 311:

- There are over 5,000 URM buildings in Oregon. Imagine the economic and societal devastation if a large percent of them collapsed in the predicted Cascadia earthquake.
- URMs comprise much of the historic fabric of Oregon communities: our original Main Streets, schools, churches, courthouses, libraries, and theaters from Jacksonville to Astoria, Coos Bay to Portland
- In addition to embodying our heritage, those buildings hold thousands of jobs.
- URMs provide apartment housing for tens of thousands of residents, many of whom are low income.
- The cost of “life-safety” level seismic retrofitting can range from \$50 to more than \$75 per square foot, yet does not translate into greater income for the property owner, making it difficult to finance – especially for small business owners.
- Oregon lacks financial tools that could offset seismic costs such as a state Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, making this proposed property tax abatement even more critical.

Our legislature would fail in its duty to protect the health, safety, and heritage of its constituents if it does not provide the means to preserve and strengthen its buildings. Please vote YES on SB 311.

Peggy Moretti
Executive Director