

House Committee on Human Services and Housing
February 7, 2017
Testimony By Doug Stamm, CEO, Meyer Memorial Trust

Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to provide an overview of the Meyer Memorial Trust's investment in and commitment to affordable housing in Oregon, along with some of our key learnings and perspectives developed along the way. With me today are Meyer's Director of Housing Theresa Deibele and Program Officer Michael Parkhurst, who are leading our work in the affordable housing sector.

First, a quick snapshot of Meyer Memorial Trust, which I imagine most of you are familiar with. The Trust represents the personal legacy of entrepreneur Fred G. Meyer, established 33 years ago as the largest private foundation in the Pacific Northwest, with assets today of approximately \$750 million. Over the years, Meyer has awarded more than \$600 million to Oregon nonprofits with the same goal as this legislative body — to improve the lives of Oregonians of every walk of life.

In 2017, we anticipate awarding approximately \$36 million. The key focus of our grantmaking and regional investments is *impact*: How can we make the greatest difference in our state and move toward our vision of a “flourishing and equitable” Oregon?

Housing has been one of Meyer's highest priorities since its inception. We assert that to reach their full potential, all people need a home that is stable, safe and reasonably affordable.

You see, when housing costs rise too high, households and families have to make brutally difficult decisions: Should we pay the rent, or should we buy food? How will we live in our home and still pay for medicine, utilities, the bus pass to get to work?

Research continues to show that housing instability contributes directly to poor performance in school, difficulties getting and keeping a good job, and poor health outcomes.

Oregon works hard to help our citizens succeed, but every other investment we make is jeopardized when people are unable to find affordable housing. Consider also the tens of thousands of our neighbors living in unsafe conditions, coping with prohibitive utility costs or simply living in fear of losing their homes.

The federal government has demonstrated a greatly diminished commitment to helping with housing needs. Multnomah County Commission Chair Deborah Kafoury recently noted that the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's decline in funding for the past 30 years has had deep ramifications leading to our housing crisis in Oregon and that we are unlikely to see improvements with the current administration.

State and local governments have a responsibility to Oregonians to fill the gap.

Since 2007, Meyer has awarded more than \$25 million in grants under our targeted affordable housing initiative, specifically around:

- Preservation of existing affordable housing — and more recently support for new housing units
- Rural Housing, with a focus on manufactured homes and manufactured home parks
- Housing advocacy, organizing, policy work and strengthening the sector across the state
- Innovations around cost efficiency
- Better alignment of housing with support and social services essential to ensuring housing stability
- Helping low-income families access affordable housing on the private market

In all this work, we have been focused on Meyer's values of diversity, equity and inclusion – prioritizing those with the greatest need and fewest resources, helping to build capacity among organizations that serve those populations, and supporting mainstream organizations to deepen their own engagement with equity issues.

I'm not here to advocate for a vote on any specific policy or measure. As much as I might like to, I am prohibited from advocating for specific legislation. I will, however, briefly share some of what we've learned in all this work in the hope that it helps you in considering the work before you this session.

First, the state is the most capable force to make a difference here. If the public sector can't make a sustained, significant commitment to helping the neediest Oregonians with their urgent housing needs, we can expect to see a sharp increase among the thousands of people already sleeping in doorways, in tent cities, in vehicles, under overpasses and in substandard manufactured housing.

Second, I urge you to view affordable housing, as we do at Meyer, as basic infrastructure, alongside parks, schools, sewers and roads. Unless we actively plan to expand it and invest in it, the need for affordable housing naturally grows as our communities grow.

Third, through funding sources like federal and state tax credits, we have evolved into a system of primarily nonprofit-driven development that creates high-quality, permanently affordable housing. That system carries out a public function, and needs and deserves public support.

Fourth, we need to preserve and rehabilitate our existing housing stock. We should not squander the investments we've already made, and worsen housing shortages.

Fifth, the state has made some headway breaching the silos between housing and health care, mental health, and other supportive services, but there is much more to be done.

We recognize that this session, you have many challenges before you. We urge you to find ways to meaningfully support affordable housing through policy and dedication of investments, giving close consideration to the legislative agenda presented by the Housing Alliance of Oregon.

The lack of affordable housing, while by no means a small problem, *is* an eminently solvable problem. Oregon has the know-how and the capacity to solve our housing shortage, if we exercise the political will.

Thank you.