



House Committee on Human Services and Housing  
Re: HB 4134, Removing Racial Restrictive Covenants

February 8, 2018

Chair Keny-Guyer and fellow committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 4134, which would streamline the process to remove racially restrictive covenants from property deeds and titles. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Advocacy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color, a coalition of 19 culturally-specific organizations dedicated to cross-cultural, collective action for racial equity. The Coalition of Communities of Color's mission is to address the socioeconomic disparities, institutional racism, and inequity of services experienced by our families, children and communities; and to organize our communities for collective action resulting in social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity.

The ability to live in a neighborhood of one's choice is a fundamental part of belonging to a community. Racially restrictive covenants are a deep violation of this basic principle. These covenants were used to permanently prohibit people of specific races from owning or renting property. The Federal Housing Administration actively encouraged the inclusion of these covenants in an effort to "maintain property value," resulting in residential segregation, wealth disparities, and housing discrimination that still impact communities of color today. Countless families of color were barred from owning homes in neighborhoods throughout Oregon, shutting them out of the most common way for households to accumulate and pass down wealth. While these covenants are now illegal and unenforceable, they remain in the deeds of many homes throughout Oregon. These covenants are an ugly reminder of the extreme injustices faced by communities of color in our state that can retraumatize homeowners of color. Removing these covenants is a step toward rejecting this racist history.

This bill would ease one element of the legal process required to remove these covenants from deeds to real property by lowering the requirements for proof of service to a good faith effort via certified mail. The current requirement of personal service is costly and burdensome, and we should not place barriers or require significant out-of-pocket expenses for homeowners, especially those of color, seeking to remove racist language from their deeds.

The impact of legalized housing discrimination continues today, as families of color face barriers to homeownership and are the hardest hit by rising rental housing costs and displacement. We note that removing racially restrictive covenants is not enough, and Oregon must prioritize ending racial disparities in homeownership. We believe that passage of this bill easing the process of removing racial restrictive covenants can be used to move the conversation toward addressing racial disparities in homeownership and housing discrimination that persist to this day.

On behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color, I respectfully urge you to take a step toward addressing racial discrimination in Oregon and support this bill to ease the process to remove racially restrictive covenants.

Thank you,  
Jenny Lee  
On Behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color

