



HOUSING ALLIANCE

March 17, 2020

Joint Special Committee on Corona Virus Response
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chair Roblan, Co-Chair Holvey, Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to share our current thoughts about the need for housing assistance to support Oregonians who are being impacted by COVID 19, both directly and indirectly as a result of the loss of income and wages.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of ninety organizations from all parts of the state. We represent a diverse set of voices including non-profit housing developers, residents of affordable housing, local jurisdictions, and organizations working to meet basic needs in every corner of our state.

We believe that all Oregonians need a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

Prior to the corona virus hitting Oregon, we knew that three out of four households with extremely low incomes were paying over half of their income towards rent. When people pay a significant portion of their income towards rent, they have too little money left over for food, medicine, utilities, and an emergency may mean they end up experiencing homelessness. With businesses shutting down and people being laid off from work, the lack of income will have severe and negative impacts on housing stability. We need urgent action from the Legislature to mitigate these impacts.

The Oregon Housing Alliance believes the Legislature should take action related to housing stability:

- First, we need to provide immediate housing stability for people with housing: We urge you to enact a statewide moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent and a suspension of late fees as a result of loss of income due to the economic impacts of coronavirus. It will be critical that the state also provide significant increased rent assistance – both directly to individuals in private rental market housing, and directly to providers of regulated affordable housing to reimburse losses during this time;
- Second, we must provide immediate resources to respond to homelessness. We need to provide significant resources for homeless service providers to continue to provide emergency shelter, increased access to motels and hotels to provide shelter to people at high risk of severe illness or who are experiencing illness, new shelter locations, increased shelter capacity including shelter capacity for people experiencing illness, and increased staff support.

Immediate Housing Stability:

We urge the Legislature to enact a statewide moratorium on evictions for non-payment of rent and a suspension of late fees. The majority of tenants who have lost income due to the virus are already facing difficult choices about whether to purchase food for their families, or whether to try to save limited

resources for an April 1st rent payment. Action from the Legislature is necessary to maintain housing stability, to keep people home from work if they are sick, and to protect public health. We are deeply concerned about economic evictions beginning as early as April 1 due to the loss of wages and other economic impacts. **The Legislature should immediately issue a moratorium on evictions to keep people in their homes.**

In addition, it will be necessary to try to help landlords of all types to pay their mortgages on their rental properties. The Legislature should make significant amounts of emergency rent assistance available to people who are being negatively impacted by COVID-19, and its economic impacts. The Legislature should provide resources through:

- **Significant increases to emergency rent assistance:** Oregon will need significant amounts of emergency rent assistance for everyone impacted economically by the corona virus, including through existing mechanisms. We may also need to consider broader, more significant provision of rent assistance.
- **Direct assistance to regulated affordable housing providers.** In Oregon, the vast majority of our regulated affordable housing has been built using federal tax credits. These resources do not allow providers to decrease or waive rent payments as a result of income losses for tenants. For the vast majority of the buildings, the federal government only provides initial construction resources. Providers of regulated affordable housing will need support from the state in order to ensure the housing stability of tenants, to waive unpaid rent accrued as a result of the economic impacts of the pandemic, maintain stability and continue essential operations. Because of the regulatory structure in place through Oregon Housing and Community Services, we would suggest that providing direct assistance to affordable housing providers whose tenants can document economic losses due to the Corona Virus may be the most expeditious path forward, and we are working to further develop this plan.

People experiencing homelessness:

Oregon has one of the highest rates of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, meaning they are sleeping outside, in a tent, or a car. A 2019 study found that Oregon is one of four states where more than half of people experiencing homelessness don't have access to shelter. In Oregon, 61% of people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered. This high rate is directly due to the lack of availability of shelter in our community.

People experiencing homelessness are our neighbors and members of our community. We must support them through this crisis.

People experiencing homelessness are often already experiencing negative health impacts of sleeping outside or other underlying medical conditions, and are at high risk of being extremely sick due to the Corona Virus. In addition, they have very limited resources to help them implement the recommended guidance about hand washing and self-isolation when they are sick.

The Legislature should provide immediate resources to support homeless service providers to:

- **Continue to provide emergency shelter.** In normal years, winter shelters would close in March as temperatures rise. We must continue to provide emergency shelter for people who do not have a safe place to call home.
- **Increase resources to provide access to motels and hotels to provide shelter to people at high risk of severe illness or who are experiencing illness.** Motels offer an opportunity to isolate people at high risk, or to provide a safe place for people to be isolated who are already experiencing illness. The Legislature should increase resources for this purpose.

- **Increased shelter capacity.** The current guidance from the CDC suggests people be kept six feet apart if they are ill. We would need to increase shelter resources to expand locations in order to maintain these distances. Current shelters are not configured to maintain this distance.
- **Increased resources to staff shelters and purchase supplies.** In many communities, shelters rely on a network of volunteers, many of whom are over 60. The current guidance means that shelters are without volunteers, and shelters should be able to hire new staff and increase salaries for current shelter staff. In addition, shelters need resources to fund hygiene resources such as hand washing stations, hand sanitizer, soap, and other supplies to limit the spread of the virus in shelters.

We would note, for the committee, that shelter is not a permanent solution to homelessness. At this time, we urgently need more shelters to provide a safe place to sleep for people experiencing homelessness. In the long-term, we must continue to address our housing needs by creating more safe, stable, and affordable homes.

In addition to these requests, the Housing Alliance will be advocating with our federal partners for:

- Increased federal resources to the federal Housing Choice Voucher and Section 8, as well as Public Housing Authority programs. Budgets for these programs are limited, and a significant loss of income for residents will result in housing authorities paying an increased amount of rent for tenants, potentially meaning they may not have sufficient funding for the remainder of the year. This is critical support and will result in the need for additional resources for rent assistance across federal programs as a direct result of COVID-19 and the economic losses associated with the virus.
- Additional funding for unexpected costs of the COVID response, including personal protective equipment for affordable housing staff who may need to enter apartments or buildings during this time to provide critical health and safety repairs or maintenance and check on vulnerable residents, and other associated costs.
- Additional resources for addressing homelessness, protecting people experiencing homelessness, and providing care to people experiencing homelessness.
- A federal moratorium or suspension of mortgage payments for landlords and homeowners who are economically impacted.

Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state during these challenging times. We urge you to act urgently to provide relief to Oregonians struggling as a result of this pandemic.

Sincerely,



Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

Cc: President Peter Courtney
Speaker Tina Kotek
Representative Alissa Keny-Guyer, Chair, House Committee on Human Services and Housing
Senator Shemia Fagan, Chair, Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Shannon Singleton, Office of Governor Kate Brown
Margaret Salazar, Director, Oregon Housing and Community Services

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
211info
Aging in the Gorge
Benton Habitat for Humanity
Bienestar
Bradley Angle
BRIDGE Housing
Business for a Better Portland
CASA of Oregon
Chrisman Development
Central City Concern
Children First for Oregon
Church Women United of Lane County
City of Beaverton
City of Eugene
City of Hillsboro
City of Portland
City of Tigard
Clackamas County
Coalition of Community Health Clinics
Coalition of Housing Advocates
College Housing Northwest
Community Action Partnership of Oregon
Community Action Team
Community Alliance of Tenants
Community Development Partners
Community Housing Fund
Community Partners for Affordable Housing
Community Vision
Cornerstone Community Housing
DevNW
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Enhabit
Enterprise Community Partners
Fair Housing Council of Oregon
Farmworker Housing Development Corp.
FOOD for Lane County
Habitat for Humanity of Oregon
Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East
Hacienda CDC
Housing Authorities of Oregon
Housing Authority of Clackamas County
Housing Development Center
Housing Oregon
Human Solutions
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization

Impact Northwest
Innovative Housing, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance on Poverty
JOIN
Lane County Health and Human Services
League of Oregon Cities
League of Women Voters of Oregon
Lincoln County
Looking Glass Community Services
Mainstream Housing Inc.
Metro
Mid-Columbia Housing Authority
NAYA Family Center
Neighborhood Partnerships
NeighborImpact
NeighborWorks Umpqua
Network for Oregon Affordable Housing
Northwest Housing Alternatives
Northwest Pilot Project
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities
Oregon Food Bank
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Proud Ground
Raphael House
REACH CDC
Residents Organizing for Change (ROC) Oregon
Rogue Action Center
Rose CDC
St. Francis Shelter
St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Inc.
ShelterCare
Sisters Habitat for Humanity
Sponsors, Inc.
SquareOne Villages
Street Roots
Think Real Estate
Transition Projects
Washington County
Welcome Home Coalition