

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for tackling the critical issues related to our current public health crisis COVID-19.

As I know you are well aware, health and housing are inextricably linked. Far too many in our state do not have access to reliable housing OR health care, and are at even greater risk than usual given the rapid transmission of this virus.

Too many Oregonians have no paid sick leave, and have already been told of reduced hours or lay-offs. These issues will bear directly on the ability to maintain housing, for those who currently have it. While we know that Housing Authorities can re-certify to reflect income changes, most tenants in either private or subsidized housing will continue to see the same rents, regardless of their reduced or nonexistent incomes. And we know that communities of color are disproportionately impacted when it comes to access to both housing and health care.

We are pleased that Portland/Multnomah County and Beaverton have already declared moratoriums on evictions for nonpayment of rent based on impacts of COVID-19. We hope that all other local jurisdictions will be able to take the same action. To do this, they will need to know that state and federal resources will be prioritized to help tenants catch up on their payments, or to provide a Landlord Guarantee Fund that could be tapped for repayment. Mortgages and other operating costs still must be paid to keep multifamily properties intact through this crisis. It may be possible for property owners to absorb some smaller costs, such as waiver of late fees.

Subsidized properties are often among the least resilient multifamily because of capped rents and high services and staffing costs – many are serving the most vulnerable Oregonians, from formerly homeless to frail elderly. We appreciate that Oregon Housing and Community Services quickly provided some relief that will allow for the social distancing we all must practice—in the form of regulatory relief to delay income recertifications and unit inspections. We ask that the state directly, or through OHCS, also advocate with the large national lenders and investors who are partners in many of these properties, as well as the IRS, to consider amendments, suspensions or changes to Section 42 (Low Income Housing Tax Credit) compliance components that will be challenging in the foreseeable future.

Working together, we can protect our most vulnerable citizens, and reduce the very high cost to families and communities that evictions create. Everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home—particularly in our darkest hours.

Thank you for your work, we look forward to taking next steps together.

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