



March 19, 2020

To: Joint Special Committee On Coronavirus Response

From: REACH Community Development

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Oregon's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

REACH is a non-profit organization, serving the Portland Metro area, that develops affordable housing and also provide property management and resident services for 2,400 existing affordable rental homes.

We greatly appreciate Oregon's diligent efforts and we understand the difficulties of operating in this environment, as we have had to adjust our daily operations in significant ways. We are following the guidance to implement social distancing through remote work except for the most essential functions.

Here are some of our current concerns and ideas for consideration with Oregon's response:

There needs to be a **stronger, more visible advocacy effort directly to HUD and the federal government for regulatory relief for housing operators and financial relief for tenants.** By making this more visible, organizations, residents and the general public could support and echo this advocacy to the federal government.

Although we are offering tenants with waived late fees and payment plans for missed rent, this will not be enough for some residents. Many residents will need financial assistance to make up for some missed rent, or else they will never catch up and could face eviction several months after the crisis subsides. **Oregon should dramatically expand its emergency rental fund and should call upon the federal government to transfer resources to every state to fund emergency rental relief programs at the state level.**

Oregon Housing and Community Services has issued a 60-day delay on annual recertifications. **We believe this delay needs to be longer.** If we have to come back into compliance on certifications on the 61st day, then that will require us to meet in person with some residents during April and early May. The annual re-certification should not be an essential task in this crisis period. It is not a health or safety issue and it does not have any bearing on the amount of rent paid. And while some residents

could complete digitally, not all residents will have capacity to do so digitally. This is an equity issue. **Annual recertifications (except for Section 8) should be delayed indefinitely until the crisis passes and then adequate time provided to come back into compliance.** If federal approval is needed, then Oregon should make its advocacy more public so partners can support the State's advocacy. We will still strive to do re-certifications electronically as much as possible, but we feel the deadline should be kept more flexible for the moment given the uncertainties and potential shelter-in-place orders.

REACH has three projects under construction funded with OHCS state tax credit resources. At the moment, construction continues, but we are facing potential delays in completion and leasing due to the emergency. **Oregon should issue a strong statement to all tax credit investors and lenders to grant extensions and revised project schedules with no financial penalty such as tax credit downward adjusters.** If federal advocacy is required, then OHCS should make that advocacy visible to the public, so that the public could support that advocacy.

We agree with OHCS's that HUD Section 8 recertifications must still be done. This IS an essential task, because it could offer residents rent relief if their income has decreased. We will continue Section 8/voucher recertifications and we support that policy.

Thank you for your consideration. We recognize we may not be aware of all of your efforts. Thank you for your leadership in this crisis.

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