



HOUSING ALLIANCE

September 24, 2020

Chair Fahey
House Committee on Housing
Oregon Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Zika, Vice-Chair Meek, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to share with you some information about what's happening across our state, to work to prevent housing instability and protect people who rent their homes across Oregon. Today, COVID-19 continues to negatively impact our communities, particularly for people with low incomes who may have lost work or income due to the virus.

Today, our hearts are with the families and individuals who have been directly impacted by the fires, and especially those folks who have lost their homes. We are working hard to understand next steps, the role of FEMA, and what the state can do to assist families as our thoughts turn towards rebuilding and recovery.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of ninety organizations from all parts of the state, including non-profit housing developers, residents of affordable housing, local jurisdictions, and organizations working to meet basic needs in every corner of our state. The Housing Alliance believes that all Oregonians deserve a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

Housing stability is critical for Oregonians. Without a home, people cannot go to work, maintain their health, or care for their children. As discussed during today's hearing, our state eviction moratorium¹ paused evictions for people who rent their homes, and is in effect until September 30, 2020. The CDC has issued an eviction moratorium is in place until the end of the year, in recognition of the critical role that housing stability plays in public health. In addition, we have in place both state and federal² foreclosure moratorium that are providing protection to Oregonians who are unable to pay their mortgage. These early actions were key to helping Oregonians stay in their homes, and we believe they must be continued.

Eviction and displacement only exacerbate the health concerns of the pandemic. Without a home, people are unable to shelter in place or to isolate if they become ill. People who rent their homes are at greatest risk of housing instability during this public health and economic crisis.

¹ https://www.oregon.gov/gov/admin/Pages/eo_20-13.aspx;
<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2020S1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB4213/Enrolled>

² <https://www.nhlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020.04.10-NHLP-Homeowner-Relief-Info-Sheet-Update2.pdf>;
<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2020S1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB4204/Enrolled>

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Census Bureau has been collecting data on housing and economic stability, and food security. The last Census Bureau Survey from the end of August³ shows that:

- Roughly one in five (19%) of Oregon's renter households report either no or slight confidence that they'll be able to pay their rent in September, and 42% percent of Oregon renters felt they were either very likely or somewhat likely to be evicted within the next two months;
- One in three renter households (36%) were spending down savings or selling personal belongings to be able to pay basic bills, and 29% were using credit cards to pay for basic necessities.
- One in five homeowners felt they were either very likely or somewhat likely to experience foreclosure in the next two months.
- Twenty eight percent of Oregonians reported difficulty paying for their usual household expenses in the last seven days.

This data reflects the seriousness of this crisis and the urgency with which we must act. We would highlight in particular how many Oregonians are using credit cards or spending down savings to pay bills, such as rent. Rent payments are a primary concern for many households, and we hear regular reports of renters making difficult choices between paying housing costs or food, or putting rent on credit cards. Oregonians are making extreme sacrifices to continue paying their housing costs, due to the fear of housing instability and homelessness. The census data reflects this as well.

We need both protection against immediate eviction through an eviction moratorium as well as rent assistance. Rent assistance supports both tenants and landlords by providing help to pay the rent. As you heard today during testimony, Oregon Housing and Community Services has also committed significant resources to rent assistance, as have some local jurisdictions. We believe additional funds are needed.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that Oregon will need \$1.2 billion⁴ to help people with very low incomes – less than half of the median income - pay rent for a twelve month period.

NLIHC based their estimate looking at historical data from the 2007-2009 recession and estimating the number of people who rent their home who earn less than half of the median income. The Coalition used information about the cost of rent in communities across the state to arrive at an estimated need \$1.2 billion in rent assistance for a twelve-month period for Oregon.

There are a number of other organizations that have also attempted to calculate the need for rental assistance in order to help folks remain stably housed. Other examples include the Urban Institute⁵, the Furman Center⁶, Amherst Market⁷, and the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies⁸. All estimate significant need to households with rental assistance, and maintain housing stability.

³ <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp13.html>

⁴ <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Need-for-Rental-Assistance-During-the-COVID-19-and-Economic-Crisis.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/price-tag-keeping-29-million-families-their-homes-162-billion>

⁶ <https://furmancenter.org/thestoop/entry/what-are-the-housing-costs-of-households-most-vulnerable-to-job-layoffs-an>

⁷ <https://files.constantcontact.com/109f2f29501/4aacc597-ecfe-43bb-a088-c5d91522e486.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/pandemic-will-worsen-housing-affordability-for-service-retail-and-transportation-workers/>

One additional approach we would highlight is the Terner Center⁹. The Terner Center uses Census data to identify renter households with at least one member working in an industry affected by layoffs and stay-at-home orders, based on data available of job losses by sector. They estimate that in Oregon, as many as 40% of renter households have been impacted by those job losses, and that those renter households pay nearly \$300 million per month in rent here in Oregon.

We know that people who rent their homes need assistance to help remain stable in housing. Our state eviction moratorium simply delays the requirement that tenants pay rents due during the emergency period. For people who have lost work or income, being able to pay several months of back housing payments at once is unrealistic without direct financial assistance, and if folks are not back to work, rent will be even further out of reach for those households.

We will need additional rent assistance to prevent eviction, housing instability or homelessness.

In closing, we reiterate that households are making tough choices to continue paying rent. No one should be evicted because of a pandemic, and we must both continue to protect households through preventing evictions as well as providing rental assistance.

Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state during these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

⁹ <https://ternercenter.berkeley.edu/blog/estimating-covid-19-impact-renters>

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 Forest Grove
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