



HOUSING ALLIANCE

February 11, 2019

House Committee on Human Services and Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Keny Guyer, Vice Chair Noble, Vice Chair Sanchez, and members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to express our support for the goals outlined in HB 2001, which seeks to increase housing options in our communities.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of ninety organizations from all parts of the state. Our members have come together with the knowledge that housing opportunity is the foundation on which all of our success is built – individual success as students, parents, workers, and community members as well as the success of our communities. 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.

Today, we simply don't have enough affordable and available homes for people across a range of incomes, and vacancy rates have dropped precipitously towards zero in communities across Oregon. People are struggling with homelessness, housing instability, rent burdens, and to make ends meet and put food on the table. During the last school year, over 22,000 of our school children in grades K – 12 experienced homelessness at some point during the year.

We believe we need to try a range of strategies to solve the problems our communities are facing. HB 2001 seeks to address the need for more housing options in our communities. Today, we know that there is a mismatch between the types of homes available, the people who need a place to live, and the incomes that people earn. Seniors, people without children, and younger people looking for their first home are looking for more affordable homes, close to work and transit, but these housing types are not currently widely available in our communities, and much of the housing being built today is out of reach for people with moderate incomes.

Today, most households in Oregon are one or two person households, which includes older families whose children have moved away, younger households just starting out, and seniors in retirement. In addition, today we have a mismatch between incomes and housing costs for too many Oregonians. Providing smaller housing types may also provide more affordable options for people in our communities – teachers, firefighters, nurses, and others – who today struggle to find a place they can afford to rent or buy.

Historically, single family zoning has been used to discriminate against people of color and people with lower incomes who may need to rent a home. Zoning laws were historically used as a tool to create communities for higher income people, which neither renters nor people of color could afford.

HB 2001 seeks to require communities to allow for more needed housing options. It would require communities of a certain size to allow housing types like duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and cottage clusters in areas currently zoned for single-family housing.

HB 2001 seeks to address the need for housing for people with moderate incomes and smaller family sizes by requiring communities above a certain size to allow other housing types, which might encourage the development of smaller and less expensive houses. By allowing duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and cottage clusters, it would allow developers to respond to a demand within the market for smaller sized, and potentially more affordable housing types, without requiring subdivision of lots. Currently, these housing types are not necessarily allowed in all residential areas in some communities in Oregon, and as a consequence, can be more difficult to build in those communities.

Many affordable housing developers who are members of the Housing Alliance still own duplexes and triplexes close to transit and amenities such as grocery stores or urban centers. Across our communities, duplexes, triplexes, and smaller housing options have been an integral part of our communities, many of which were built either because the local zoning code allows them, or because they were built prior to changes which outlawed these housing types. With changes in zoning codes, these types of housing options are no longer being built in some communities, and can be an option which adds more density, at potentially more affordable prices.

For developers of affordable homeownership options, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and cottage clusters are an exciting option, but are extremely difficult to build because of current zoning laws. If these housing types are not allowed, developers must go through a lengthy and expensive process to divide the lot, and also face regulations which have the impact of preventing housing types other than single family homes.

Increasing the number of homes which can be built per lot, subject to reasonable restrictions allowed under HB 2001, may over time either help to decrease the cost per home or offer options which are better aligned with current needs based on household size. Per the Office of Economic Analysis:

The problem is in many places one cannot simply build more housing due to zoning restrictions (minimum lot size requirements, setbacks, parking etc). However, if a community were to allow for more units to be built on a given parcel of land, then better affordability can be achieved, and future growth more efficiently accommodated. This is for at least two reasons. First, one would be dividing high land costs over a larger number of units which both lowers cost per unit and increases supply relative to existing zoning. Second, each unit will be smaller than under current zoning, which also lowers the cost per unit.¹

HB 2001 would require communities over a certain size to implement this bill by updating codes as well as local plans. The Housing Alliance membership includes many cities who are in agreement with the goal of HB 2001 but have concerns about their capacity to implement it. Effective implementation of this legislation will require cities to balance a range of factors, needs, public input, and other planning requirements. We are glad to see monetary support for local jurisdictions to help implement these proposals, and encourage further discussion of what is needed for this to succeed, including discussions about timelines.

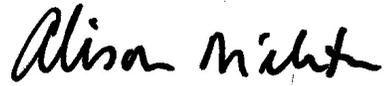
We know what home, and what stable housing, means to all of us. When people have safe and stable housing, it has significant benefits. Kids are able to focus on the things that matter – being kids, doing their homework –

¹ “Reconsidering Single Family Zoning” Office of Economic Analysis, December 12, 2018
<https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2018/12/12/reconsidering-single-family-zoning/>

instead of worrying about where their families will sleep at night. Parents are able to focus on work. Safe and stable housing that people can afford is key to accessing opportunity.

Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison McIntosh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance