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**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 737
Before the Senate Committee on Human Services**

February 21st, 2019

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Heard, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 737, which would renew two local option property tax exemption statutes.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Helping families maintain safe, stable housing is a critical part of our work. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy. In almost every community across the state, Oregonians are rent-burdened and vacancy rates are extremely low. We know that this is not just an urban problem - rural Oregonians are particularly impacted.¹ More than 21,000 students experienced homelessness last year, with some of the highest rates coming from rural districts. Affordable housing is disproportionately difficult to find and maintain for communities of color, single women with children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

We appreciate that this legislature is poised to consider a variety of ways to help ensure access to stable, safe, affordable, and secure housing for all of our communities. This session, we hope to encourage the construction and preservation of more affordable housing stock, greater access to supportive housing, stronger tenant protections, and greater support for specialized and general emergency shelter and housing assistance.

Property tax exemptions are an important method of incentivizing and supporting the development of affordable housing in communities across the state. These exemptions are of particular help to local governments taking steps to address shortages in their own communities. Increasing supply is an important aspect of addressing our housing crisis, and Senate Bill 737 is one small but critical tool for this purpose.

For the above reasons, we urge support of this bill, and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely, Sybil Hebb

¹ <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2018/03/07/update-on-rural-housing-affordability/>