



February 21, 2019

Senate Committee on Human Services
Oregon Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Heard, and Members of the Committee,

WNHS (including NEDCO, with whom we recently merged) fully supports SB 278-1 with the proposed amendments. WNHS owns an 11-unit apartment complex in Lane County that is dedicated to youth aging out of our foster care system. The complex was the first of its kind in Oregon; we hope to add many more across our service area, but for now, Oregon has a severe shortage of housing available and affordable to this population. SB 278-1 will help all youth aging out of care, whether they can access affordable housing or must search on the open market.

Youth in our foster care system face intense barriers in their transition to adulthood, and access to safe, stable, affordable housing is perhaps the biggest challenge of all. Youth age out of care with no credit history, no rental history, no parental co-signer, no experience with managing money or banking, no savings, and far too little income to meet traditional requirements for a market-rate rental. They are under the age of 21, and we expect them – without any of these resources – to find market-rate housing in the middle of a housing crisis. Youth (and their Independent Living Program caseworker, if they are lucky enough to have one) must find generous landlords who are willing to waive nearly every screening requirement on their rental application, and take a leap of faith on a young person who is renting for the first time. You can imagine the difficulty of that request.

SB 278-1 offers youth aging out of care access to the Rent Well program and its associated Rent Guarantee Program. For youth who complete a Rent Well class, they can offer a prospective landlord the class certification and access to a guarantee fund in the event of future unpaid rent or damages. Youth gain the knowledge of how to be a good tenant, and landlords have an incentive to waive their application criteria and give these youth a chance as renters.

Until Oregon has enough dedicated units of affordable housing for youth aging out of care, SB 278-1 is a good first step to give these young adults a fighting chance to access the private rental market. We urge your support for this bill, and others that will help support foster youth in their transition to adulthood.

Thank you for your consideration, and for working to help Oregon's most vulnerable youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Reiman".

Emily Reiman
CEO