



RE: SB 595 - Chair Kafoury Testimony

Chair Hass, and members of the Finance and Revenue committee.

Already, this legislature has demonstrated what it means to tackle a serious issue head-on. Because, as we all know, the housing crisis is here to stay if we don't act boldly.

Based on the simple premise that everyone has a right to a safe, stable and affordable place to call home, government has a profound responsibility to act when that right is threatened on such a scale. And, collectively, we now seem to have some agreement that this is the most pressing issue in our state.

That's a good thing.

Over the past decade, we have sharpened our tools and rightly prioritized this issue above others, because as you know, without housing, all the other challenges a person may face, whether it's consistent access to education, healthcare, or employment, suddenly become almost impossible to solve.

But while we are more focussed and coordinated than ever, unfortunately, our resources have never been a match for the problem. In fact, we will soon begin to see increasing pressure on the funding that we do have. Many of us leading local governments across Oregon are now being confronted with structural deficits. Multnomah County is no exception.

Senate Bill 595 would give us a tool to use to help meet the structural funding problems related to Housing and Homelessness Services.

SB 595 would allow cities and counties to guarantee money from tourism-generated dollars and direct those dollars to affordable housing and ending homelessness.

And for Multnomah County, the link between tourism and housing is clear, if not obvious.

Tourism has become a key economic driver for our region, and the things that make our state attractive are the exact same things that drive up costs in the housing market:

- i) access to Oregon's famous rivers and mountains;
- ii) access to the coast and its beautiful towns; and of course
- iii) access to wine country, the food scene, and the breweries

It's why people visit, it's why countless industries host conventions here, and ultimately, it's why many people relocate to Oregon.

So let's remember, the root of the housing crisis is that we don't have enough housing units for all the people that already live here, and for those that want to live here.

The shortage of units is a math problem, but the outcome is very human: people are forced out onto the streets, to live their private lives in public.

As a result, homelessness is now visible in almost every part of the state.

So it's not surprising that hotels and the tourism industry regularly tell me that the number one issue on their minds is also homelessness.

Given the connection, the option to dedicate some revenue from existing tourism dollars seems like a no-brainer.

And I can tell you that, for my own part, upon passage of Senate Bill 595, I will continue to make every effort to work with our friends from the tourism industry to ensure that the funding goes directly towards ending homelessness.

Thank you.

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

Deborah Kafoury, Chair
Multnomah County Board of Commissioners