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**TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB 595**  
**March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

Chair Hass, Vice-Chair Bentz, 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 595, which would expand the flexibility of funds raised by the transient lodging tax to allow greater capacity for local communities to address the housing crisis.

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. As rental vacancy rates have plummeted and housing has become less and less affordable across the state, our clients have increasingly struggled to maintain stability for themselves and their children. An increasing number of our clients are homeless, and homeownership is ever-more out of reach of most Oregonians.

We know that this is not just an urban problem - rural Oregonians are particularly impacted.<sup>1</sup> 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. While the risks and burdens of this crisis rest most heavily on the shoulders of low-income families, it is not only they who are at risk. We hear stories of middle income, working Oregonians living in their cars, seeking services from shelters, or desperately afraid of homelessness. This housing insecurity has untold negative consequences for the health, education, safety, and stability of all of our communities. These pressures are especially severe in rural vacation home communities across Oregon.

SB 595 would allow local communities to make decisions about how to use the net revenue raised by the existing or future transient lodging taxes to address their local housing crises. The bill would ensure that tourism can continue to be a positive factor in a community, by allowing use of tourism revenues to offset some of the housing crunch created by the vacation rental market. This bill is a creative and common-sense approach to giving cities more tools to create stability for local communities.

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, and greater support for specialized and general emergency shelter and housing assistance. SB 595 is one part of this package of solutions to our current statewide crisis.

I thank the committee members for their time and attention to this issue, and urge support of this important bill.

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