



HOUSING ALLIANCE

April 8, 2019

Senate Committee on Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Fagan, Vice Chair Heard, members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to express our support for SB 820 and the -1 amendments, which will provide financial assistance for pre-mediation counseling for homeowners facing foreclosure through the Oregon Foreclosure Avoidance program.

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 homes for people who need them, and vacancy rates have dropped precipitously towards zero in communities across Oregon. People – our neighbors and members of our community – 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 21,750 of our school children in grades K – 12 experienced homelessness at some point during the year. Oregonians in all corners of the state continue to struggle with foreclosure, and being delinquent on their mortgage payments.

The Oregon Foreclosure Avoidance program has been incredibly successful. It was first created via bipartisan legislation in 2011, and modified in 2012. The Oregon Foreclosure Avoidance Program provides homeowners the opportunity to meet directly and mediate with their lender, and also provides that homeowners are supported by a network of foreclosure counselors to help homeowners prepare for mediation.

The mediation program, which includes administration, access to trained mediators, and support for resolution conferences, has been funded through fees paid by both lenders and homeowners. Since the creation of the program, the foreclosure counseling portion of the program has been funded by the Legislature through the general fund, and administered by Oregon Housing and Community Services.

We have a network of counseling agencies across the state who meet with homeowners, analyze their financial situation, discuss options, and attend the meetings between lenders and homeowners. Counselors provide neutral, third-party support to help homeowners as they navigate a system that provides limited information to homeowners. For people who access counseling, the success rates are remarkable – over 70% of people make an agreement with their lender to stay in their home. Counseling, plus mediation, is the key to helping homeowners remain stable in their homes and avoid foreclosure in a sustainable, long term way.

Oregonians need access to an ongoing foreclosure counseling program in Oregon. Today, there are still far too many families experiencing being behind or in default on their mortgages, and these families need access to counselors. Other states have recently acted to permanently fund foreclosure counseling programs.

Counseling agencies are operating across Oregon, and are closely tracking outcomes. They report that counseling has successfully increased the number of homeowners avoiding foreclosure and decreased the time it takes to finalize workout agreements.

It is important to all parties to a foreclosure (lenders and borrowers) that homeowners have access to trained counseling services before and during the foreclosure process. Counseling helps homeowners better understand their options and navigate a complex process, and access to counseling results in better outcomes.


Funding for foreclosure counseling in the 2019-21 biennium at \$1.24 million would maintain access to counseling across Oregon, would help to maintain the geographic reach of the network and would maintain expertise within the network. Oregon homeowners who are at risk of foreclosure need access to this critical resource. The -1 amendments to SB 820 provide \$1.24 million to fully fund foreclosure counseling for the 2019-21 biennium.

We know what home, and what stable housing, means to all of us. When people have safe and stable housing, it has important and significant benefits, and allows people to build for their futures. Kids are able to focus on the things that matter – being kids, doing their homework – instead of worrying about where their families will sleep at night. Parents are able to focus on work, on family, and on community. Safe and stable housing that people can afford is key to accessing opportunity.

We urge you to support SB 820 and the -1 amendments, and provide \$1.24 million to support foreclosure counseling for the 2019-21 biennium.

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

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
211info
Aging in the Gorge
Benton Habitat for Humanity
Bienestar
Bradley Angle
BRIDGE Housing
CASA of Oregon
Central City Concern
Chrisman Development
Church Women United of Lane County
City of Beaverton
City of Creswell
City of Eugene
City of Forest Grove
City of Hillsboro
City of Hood River
City of Portland
City of Tigard
Coalition of Community Health Clinics
Coalition of Housing Advocates
Common Ground OR-WA
Community Action Partnership of Oregon
Community Action Team
Community Alliance of Tenants
Community Housing Fund
Community Partners for Affordable Housing
Community Vision
Cornerstone Community Housing
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Enhabit
Enterprise Community Partners
Fair Housing Council of Oregon
FOOD for Lane County
Habitat for Humanity of Oregon
Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East
Hacienda CDC
Housing Authority of Clackamas County
Housing Development Center
Housing Oregon
Human Solutions
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
Impact Northwest
Innovative Housing, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance on Poverty
JOIN

Lane County Health and Human Services
League of Women Voters of Oregon
Lincoln County
Looking Glass Community Services
Mainstream Housing, Inc
Metro
Mid Columbia Housing Authority
Native American Youth and Family Center
(NAYA)
Neighborhood Economic Development Corp.
(NEDCO)
Neighborhood Partnerships
NeighborImpact
NeighborWorks Umpqua
Network for Oregon Affordable Housing
Northwest Housing Alternatives
Northwest Pilot Project
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Center for Christian Voices
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities
Oregon Food Bank
Oregon Housing Authorities
Oregon Law Center
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Portland Housing Center
Proud Ground
Raphael House
REACH CDC
Rogue Action Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Inc.
ShelterCare
Sisters Habitat for Humanity
Sponsors, Inc.
SquareOne Villages
Street Roots
Transition Projects
Turning Point
Washington County
Welcome Home Coalition
Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services