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**Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Testimony in Support of SB 1534
February 4, 2020**

Chair Fagan and Members of the Committee:

My name is Becky Straus and I am a Staff Attorney with the Oregon Law Center (OLC). OLC is a non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Thank you for the opportunity to express OLC's support of SB 1534, which would return to Oregon the work of investigating and enforcing federal fair housing violations.

One of the most important issues in the lives of OLC's clients across the state is the challenge to find and maintain safe, stable, affordable housing. Housing is about much more than a roof over one's head; it is about opportunity, stability, and health. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible for families to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy.

SB 1534 promotes housing stability, health and opportunity because it takes an important step to protect Oregonians from housing discrimination. SB 1534 will return Oregon to "substantial equivalency," meaning that fair housing laws in our statute are adequately similar to federal law such that the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will contract with Oregon Labor and Industries (OLI) to enforce fair housing laws in our state. This change is minor in terms of the number of words the bill amends, but the change will have a big and beneficial impact in the lives of Oregonians experiencing discrimination in housing.

Unfortunately, discrimination in housing is commonplace in our communities.¹ Currently, without OLI enforcement, tenants are left to report incidents to HUD. At HUD, backlogged cases often languish for years. Instead, OLI investigators know Oregon, they know the local market and they do a thorough job investigating cases. SB 1534 is important because it will help to return to OLI the job of protecting civil rights in housing in Oregon. It is a significant bill to promote access to justice for our client community and we urge your support.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you may have. Thank you.

¹ Fair Housing Audit, Portland, December 2019 (<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/phb/article/749867>)