



February 4, 2020

To: Senator Shemia Fagan and Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development

From: Paige Spence, Government Relations, Washington County

Re: Support for SB 1534, allowing BOLI to pursue housing discrimination claims

Dear Senator Fagan and Committee Members:

I am writing to urge your support for SB 1534, which would provide the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) the ability to play the role of a Substantially Equivalent agency to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in adjudicating cases involving housing discrimination of federally protected classes.

In 2015, BOLI relinquished its role as a Substantially Equivalent entity thereby ensuring that all cases involving housing discrimination of federally protected classes be investigated by HUD. According to the Fair Housing Council of Oregon, this reduction in capacity to investigate and adjudicate discrimination cases has created backlogs impacting how quickly cases can be resolved.

Over the last 14 months, Washington County has been working on its Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. HUD requires that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grantees like Washington County undertake this effort every five years. Part of this process involves assessment, through data, of the impediments or barriers to fair housing choice. One element of research we conducted was to hire the Fair Housing Council of Oregon to conduct “pairs testing,” an objective testing method to identify differential treatment or practices, in rental housing in Washington County to assess the barriers that people in protected classes might face when seeking housing.

The results of audit tests conducted between January and September 2019 revealed that housing providers continue to provide adverse, differential treatment to prospective renters based on a person’s race, national origin, disability, or source of income (a state protected class). The value of this information in our planning effort was not to obtain a statistically valid sample of tests, but instead to create a record of specific barriers that limit diversity, inclusion, and equity in the community we call home. The Coalition of Communities of Color conducted eleven focus groups as part of our planning effort engaging eight communities of color to learn of the challenges people are facing in their everyday lives. Housing discrimination was a common theme.

Washington County needs all tools available in our work to combat housing discrimination. Housing discrimination cannot be cured through one-dimensional, short-term solutions. Washington County strongly encourages the Senate Committee on Housing and Development to support BOLI’s request to pursue Substantial Equivalency and provide the necessary funding for the agency to adequately staff its

County Administrative Office

155 N First Avenue, Suite 300, Hillsboro, OR 97214
phone: (503) 846-8685 • fax: (503) 846-4545

investigatory and enforcement positions so that we continue to reduce barriers to fair housing choice that should not continue to exist 52 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paige Spence". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paige Spence, Paige Spence, Washington County Government Relations Manager
paige_spence@co.washington.or.us

County Administrative Office

155 N First Avenue, Suite 300, Hillsboro, OR 97214
phone: (503) 846-8685 • fax: (503) 846-4545