

November, 2021

House Speaker Tina Kotek
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Senate President Peter Courtney
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Subject: Call to Action --- Fund expanded mediation to address eviction crisis

Dear Speaker Kotek and President Courtney,

Oregon faces a very serious, immediate housing crisis. A looming wave of evictions is upon us and will impact individuals, families, and communities in every corner of our state in ways that are likely to be devastating.

Oregon had over 18,000 evictions in both 2018 and 2019, before the disruption of the pandemic. The eviction moratorium has been effective at postponing a full-blown crisis, while our collective best efforts to deliver rental assistance has been extremely challenging. Even with improved distribution, there will be people missed, many who do not qualify for rental assistance, yet have arrearages, and there is a very high likelihood that communities of color will be disparately impacted. Community safety net services will bear considerable costs from mass evictions. As highlighted in the 2021 report by [Portland State University's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative](#), Oregon's downstream costs from mass evictions could be as high as \$3.3 billion.

We write to you today with a very simple and clear request.

We urge the Oregon Legislature to immediately allocate \$2.5 million to expand the capacity of our existing statewide community mediation system to meet eviction case demands across Oregon.

- With appropriate funding, Oregon's 15 community mediation centers can handle additional cases throughout the state.
- Community mediation programs in Oregon successfully mobilized in response to the foreclosure crisis that hit Oregon in 2009 to create the [Oregon Foreclosure Avoidance Program](#) that remains successful to this day.
- Mediation can increase awareness of available resources. Mediation is one more avenue for both tenants and housing providers to learn about rent assistance, rehousing resources, and legal aid.

Eviction court backlog will cause delay and more uncertainty for tenants and housing providers. Importantly, **mediation offers more flexible solutions than can be ordered by judges**. For tenants, mediation can address the specifics of each case to see if arrearages can be paid and tenancy stabilized, or a plan for moving out can be created. For housing providers, mediation can address rent arrearages and reduce costs associated with an eviction.

[The White House](#), [Harvard & the American Bar Association](#), and many states (e.g. [Massachusetts](#) and [Hawaii](#)) support mediation as an effective and efficient housing stability tool.

We urge you to adopt a wrap-around approach to address the looming eviction crisis, that include eviction avoidance mediation. We can't afford to leave any available tool to be unused when so many Oregonian's face life changing circumstances.

Signed by:

Clackamas County



Xanthippe Augerot
Nancy Wyse
Pat Malone
Benton County Board of Commissioners



Joe Berney
Pat Farr
Lane County Board of Commissioners



Wasco County Board of Commissioners



Melissa Cribbins
Bob Main
John Sweet
Coos County Board of Commissioners



Sharon Meieran, MD, JD
Multnomah County Commissioner



Lori Stegmann
Multnomah County Commissioner



Jeremy Gordon
Polk County Commissioner



Claire Hall
Lincoln County Commissioner



Phil Chang
Deschutes County Commissioner



Mayor Lucy Vinis

Earnesto Fonseca, PhD
Hacienda CDC



Jimmy Jones
Executive Director
Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency



Pegge McGuire
Executive Director
Community Services Consortium



Hon. Richard B. Brissenden
Lane County Justice Court



City of Springfield



City of Gresham



City of Hillsboro



City of Beaverton



Jim Doherty
Morrow County Commissioner



Patrick Sponsler
Oregon Office for Community Dispute Resolution



Michelle Leonard, Trial Court Administrator
Union County Circuit Court
Partnered with Eastern Oregon Mediation Center