

## Joint Task Force Addressing Racial Disparities in Home Ownership

# Fair Housing Law Statewide Regional Enforcement and Awareness Proposal August 18, 2022

### Proposal

Violations of fair housing laws in the state of Oregon are enforced through a combination of administrative processes through the state's Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) and private rights of action, supported by the state's only private, nonprofit-qualified fair housing organization—Fair Housing Council of Oregon (FHCO)—and local civil rights attorneys.

This proposal recommends continued support of approximately \$5 million of state General Fund moneys for the 2023-2025 biennium for fair housing enforcement and awareness as follows:

- Funding for FHCO of \$1.2 million annually to fund 12 FTEs statewide;
- Support of the BOLI budget, including \$1.15 million annually (\$2.3 million for the biennium) to support one Program Manager (1.00 FTE); six Civil Rights Investigators (6.00 FTE) to support housing discrimination investigation in four priority regions; and one Training and Development Specialist (1.00 FTE) to provide statewide fair housing education and outreach; and
- Support of the Department of Justice (DOJ) budget, including \$225,000 annually to fund 1 FTE statewide.

*Note: these are the 2021-2023 actual numbers and will need to be adjusted for natural cost increases.*

### Background

In the 2021-2023 biennium, the Legislative Assembly provided General Fund funding to BOLI, DOJ, and the FHCO to build a network of local collaborations in four priority regions throughout the state of Oregon. These collaborations bring together local resources to increase both knowledge about and access to fair housing resources and increase reporting of housing discrimination in local communities.

The statewide network consists of four priority regional locations centered in north coastal; southern, eastern, and central Oregon. Each regional collaboration consists of a regional BOLI civil rights investigator; an FHCO Regional Enforcement Liaison; a housing navigator embedded within a local organization; and a local landlord-tenant legal resource, such as Legal Aid Society of Oregon. These regional collaborative teams are further supported by a centralized BOLI Fair Housing Enforcement Program Manager; an FHCO Statewide Fair Housing Enforcement Collaborative Program Manager, Statewide Enforcement Intake Coordinator, and an Operations Manager; and a DOJ Assistant Attorney General focused on housing enforcement.

## **Problem Statement**

There is limited capacity among BOLI and FHCO for educating and enforcing fair housing laws throughout the entirety of the state of Oregon, particularly in rural and frontier communities across the vast state. In addition, a lack of resources centered in local communities erodes the ability to build trust between those communities and fair housing enforcement entities working to address violations of housing discrimination. As a result, instances of housing discrimination are likely under-reported in these communities and those experiencing housing discrimination remain underserved. Reports from state agencies tasked with monitoring compliance with federal housing regulations have identified a distinct lack of knowledge among particularly rural residents about how and to whom they should report housing discrimination.