



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

March 8, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 2100-1

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Campos, Vice-Chair Morgan, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, in support of HB 2100-1.

Northwest Pilot Project is a nonprofit agency serving seniors experiencing housing instability and homelessness in Multnomah County. In our work to end homelessness for older adults, we have learned that we cannot accomplish our goals without confronting the urgent need to address systemic racial inequality and how it manifests in both the problem of our housing and homelessness crisis as well as in our policy and programmatic solutions.

Due to structural racism, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities are disproportionately represented among the vulnerable seniors we serve. We recognize that older adult homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked to a long and continued history of race-based housing and economic inequality in the US. Every day, housing and homeless service providers in our region confront the long-term effects of profound injustices and racist public policy that have created stark racial disparities in housing access and stability. These growing disparities have become more apparent through our 50-plus years of providing housing stabilization services to seniors, and we have committed organizational resources to developing culturally responsive services and racially equitable policies and practices within our programs. However, we know this commitment is only one step, and that BIPOC older adults should have access to culturally specific services, and that mainstream and dominant culture organizations like ours cannot fill the same important role as culturally specific providers.

Dismantling structural racism in housing and homeless services requires significant targeted investment as well as system reconfiguration. In our statewide system, we must address the fact that aside from Community Action Agencies, community based organizations cannot apply directly to state homeless assistance funding streams or provide advice to OHCS and the

Housing Stability Council on resources and planning. This exclusivity reinforces a power imbalance which cannot be equalized through the representation of BIPOC communities in existing institutional leadership or engagement alone. The proposed steps in HB 2100-1 take urgent and measurable action to correct this imbalance by expanding direct access to statewide homeless services resources and by prioritizing inclusion of key stakeholders to advise OHCS on programming.

Addressing racial disparities in our homeless service system requires multiple strategies, and strengthening and growing culturally specific organizations through additional resources and funding opportunities is another key part of this work. Without expanded capacity and resources directed to culturally specific services, as well as consistent performance standards for all OHCS grant recipients, our current networks are not as robust or collaborative as they need to be, and the aggregate impact of our efforts to reduce racial disparities in our field remain insufficient. We must move beyond the status quo. We have the opportunity to do so now by moving forward with HB 2100-1, which would open a substantial amount of current resources to applications from all providers, including culturally specific agencies, and require outcomes-oriented contracting for all homeless service funds, promoting nationally and regionally recognized best practices to prevent and end homelessness. NWPP also echoes the concerns of other housing advocates and community based organizations that have highlighted the need for a larger pool of resources to be available for competitive applications and we support the Oregon Housing Alliance proposal to look deeper into this issue with a task force that would recommend additional changes to the 2022 legislature.

We want to thank OHCS for their work on HB 2100-1, a significant and timely step towards the necessary transformation of our systems and practices to ensure equal housing access and opportunity for all Oregonians. Ultimately, if we do not embrace opportunities to expand culturally specific services *and* the decision-making table, promote accountability for outcomes, and make every effort to eliminate racial disparities, our collective efforts to end homelessness will miss the mark.

On behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, we strongly recommend that the committee support this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Golino de Lovato
Executive Director

Marisa Espinoza
Public Policy Coordinator