



**Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and
Economic Development**

**Testimony in Support of HB 5015
March 10th, 2021**

Co-Chairs Beyer and Gomberg and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this testimony in support of HB 5015 and the Governor's Recommended Budget proposal that will support the Bureau of Labor and Industries when Oregon reconnects to HUD this fall, bringing the work of investigating and enforcing federal fair housing violations home to our state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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. 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.

This budget investment will promote housing stability, health and opportunity for low-income Oregonians. In the fall, Oregon's fair housing statutes will return 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 once again contract with Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) to enforce fair housing laws in our state. This 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 BOLI enforcement, tenants are left to report incidents to HUD. At HUD, backlogged cases often languish for years. Instead, BOLI investigators know Oregon, they know the local market and they do a thorough job investigating cases. As investigation and enforcement return to Oregon, we expect trust in the system to rise. And, we expect caseloads to rise. During this pandemic and economic crisis, enforcing federal Fair Housing Laws is critical to the safety and stability of our communities.

This budget proposal to ensure adequate staffing for BOLI's Fair Housing enforcement division will 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>)