



March 16, 2021

Sen. Kayse Jama, Chair Senate Committee on Housing & Development
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: SB 8 Testimony - Affordable Housing

Better Housing Together is a multi-sector, community-led housing advocacy organization based in Lane County. As an independent 501(c)3 and a network of more than 50 local partner organizations and businesses, we work collaboratively to increase housing affordability, diversity and supply.

We pursue a collective impact model to build support for action and innovation, and we believe in the power of partnership. We advocate for sustainable, walkable neighborhoods and champion well-designed infill redevelopment that reduces our impact on the climate and makes our community more inclusive and resilient.

The lack of appropriate, affordable housing is a crisis in Lane County. The combination of local opposition to housing, high housing costs, relatively low wages, minimal vacancy, housing under-production, and a high instance of homelessness present a unique and systemic challenge. We need many tools and actions, and we need local and state support.

We support SB 8 because it builds on recent statewide work to remove barriers to housing construction, “find land” for affordable housing, and particularly because it supports local faith communities’ options to use their property for housing, which we have recommended previously.

In late 2019, Lane County asked Better Housing Together to guide the development of a multijurisdictional Affordable Housing Action Plan “to increase housing options for residents to reduce the incidence of homelessness and increase affordability.” Among key, near-term actions were “Leverage Public Land for Housing” and create an “Inter-jurisdictional Faith Communities Partnership Program”—both of which are supported by SB 8.

Initial GIS mapping of Lane County show that religious properties occupy more than 1,450 acres in Lane County, with 532 acres of that property inside the EUG/SPG urban growth boundaries. Many of these properties are located with excellent access to transit, parks, and schools; if even a small portion of this land were available for affordable housing, the outcomes would be significant. While the initial work on this policy in Lane County is very encouraging, SB 8 would allow a similar outcome swiftly and consistently.

Lane County is making progress, but we still need much more capacity and fewer barriers to meet our housing needs. We believe SB 8 will assist in local efforts to “find land” for affordable housing, discourage its obstruction, and bring more local partners to the effort.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kaarin Knudson".

Kaarin Knudson, AIA
Founding Director and Steering Committee
Better Housing Together