

March 23, 2021

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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 3184.

My name is Cristina Palacios and I am an advocate for housing and economic justice in the Portland metro area. In 2017 I took my then-72-year old father, Ramon, to Northwest Pilot Project to get help with finding stable housing. There didn't seem to be any options for places he could afford because of how little retirement income he receives, despite working hard his whole life.

My parents separated when I was 3 years old,. My dad became a single father and kept coming back and forth from USA and Mexico because he had to earn enough money to support himself here and enough to support the 5 of us back in Mexico. Because my mom left us, we, all the kids were living with different family members. My dad never made enough money to give to all the different family members taking care of us because how little money he made here in the USA and because he was also trying to survive in another country. He always worked very low paying jobs: from fields, to factories, and corner jobs— his hourly rate was usually around \$1.25 or less when he worked on the fields. Because he had to go back to Mexico to check on us, he usually was unable to maintain long term jobs for most of his working years. He also tried to go to school to learn English but he was too exhausted most of the days so he only learned a little bit. My father stopped attending school in Mexico in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to help his father to work the fields so he barely knows how to read and write in Spanish; this was another barrier he had in both countries. Because his low literacy he never found out that he could claim us as dependents so he never got tax credits for us nor he could he get most of his benefits because back then he was here without a legal status. All those things really affected him when it was time to retire, because in spite of all his years of labor, his monthly income amount squared up to be \$199 monthly.

When he could no longer work due to aging, he started living in California, going from one of my siblings' house to another. That only worked for few years, so I brought him to Oregon where all I could offer him was a couch in our living room. That also only worked for 2-3 years because eventually, my landlord started giving me a hard time and threatened to evict me and my family for having too many people in our two-bedroom apartment. It was me, my husband, my two daughters and my dad in the unit and was given several warnings to move out.

As much as I wanted to obey the apartment rules I could not afford to rent a three bedroom apartment nor did I make enough money to cover a place where my dad could live on his own.

I was very lucky that one of the volunteers I knew told me about Northwest Pilot Project, and as soon as I could, I gave them a call and they quickly set us up with an appointment. A case manager began to help my father apply for low-income housing opportunities in Multnomah County. Though we were relieved to finally have a plan for permanently affordable housing, we were also very worried, because the buildings he was eligible for would take at least 2-3 years to call his name. And most open waitlists were in downtown Portland, far from where I live in East County and where my dad can access support from friends and his community. I was beginning to worry more about his health, so I wanted him to be close by. But I encouraged him to apply anyway, knowing how important it was for him to have rent he could afford, an amount based on his monthly income, so that he could maintain his independence and his health.

Months later, the case manager called us to say that my father was now eligible for an LRA voucher, through a pilot project that was just starting in Multnomah County. They explained that this was just

like receiving a Section 8 voucher: he could use this at a building of his choice, and pay only 30% of his income on a permanent basis. The relief I felt was incredible. **Suddenly, years of waiting and worrying about where he might end up seemed to disappear.** I was literally crying, knowing that finally my father could have a place where he could be without the fear of being evicted or causing me to be evicted.

That same week we were told from NW Pilot Project that my father qualified for this program, I took my dad to see a new apartment we thought might work for him. NWPP helped us apply and set up the voucher, and in just a few weeks, he moved into an apartment that is close to my home and all the places my father needs to access. He is close enough that I can check on him regularly, take him to his medical appointments, invite him for dinner or bring him a warm meal. This program is a life-changer for us.

He has now lived there for about four years. He says, “I love having my own place and having my only child in Oregon so close to me, she helps me with so many things and always makes sure I am doing okay.”

Please support HB 3184 so that more older adults like my father can access a safe and stable home in Oregon. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Cristina Palacios