



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

March 23, 2021

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

RE: Support for HB 3184

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project in support of HB 3184. We serve people aged 55 and older experiencing housing instability and homelessness in Multnomah County and work to end homelessness for low income seniors, who are among the fastest growing segments of the population experiencing homelessness.

Our agency is proud to be a founding partner of the highly successful Long Term Rent Assistance (LTRA) program in Multnomah County, which began in 2018. This program provides a tenant-based permanent housing subsidy to eligible participants and can be used effectively for both homelessness prevention and housing placement for households exiting homelessness.

We developed the Multnomah County program to address the lack of affordable units for the older adults who contact our agency in search of affordable housing and often rely on Social Security as their only source of income. Since the early 2010s, social service agencies have seen a notable increase in older adults seeking emergency housing assistance. More individuals are facing extreme rental cost burdens and experiencing homelessness at a later age.¹ Due to structural racism, older adults who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color are disproportionately represented among the participants we serve, who often live on 30% or less of the Area Median Income.²

In my previous role as a case manager, I was grateful to be a part of the initial rollout of the pilot and share in the relief and joy of participants who could finally access a permanent voucher. I had worked with hundreds of clients by that point, but the reality of highly limited housing options for the vulnerable seniors I assisted did not become any easier to accept. Typically, developing a housing plan with a client required a shared acknowledgement that their options were confined to a relatively small number of buildings with open waitlists, often in unfamiliar

¹ The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness (2019), Dennis Culhane, PhD et al. <https://www.aisp.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Emerging-Crisis-of-Aged-Homelessness-1.pdf>

² Low Income Older Adults Face Unaffordable Rents, Driving Housing Instability and Homelessness (2021), Justice In Aging. <https://justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Older-Adults-Rental-Housing-Burdens.pdf>

areas far from their support networks. Especially for our participants with disabilities who required homes that met specific accessibility needs, as well as those who struggled with being uprooted from their familiar neighborhoods and trusted communities, providing real housing choice through a tenant based voucher removed one of the most challenging hurdles in these clients' pursuit of a stable place to call home.

The Multnomah County LTRA program began with just 45 vouchers and now serves 72 households, including families with children. The July 2019 evaluation report³ published by the Center for Outcomes Research and Education about the LRA program confirmed what we had hoped: with permanent rent assistance, our participants thrived, reporting a 100% retention rate in stable housing while also demonstrating substantial improvements in mental and physical health as well as other aspects of wellbeing.

From our vantage point, investing in LTRA across the state would not only benefit seniors, but also families with children, youth exiting foster care, and other populations at high risk for housing instability and homelessness. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Oregon has only 28 affordable and available rental units for every 100 extremely low income renter households. Additionally, our state has the 6th greatest percentage of extremely low-income renter households with severe cost burdens.⁴

Unfortunately, federal tenant-based or project-based vouchers only serve 1 in 4 households that are eligible for long-term rental subsidies. Our organization is very encouraged by ongoing efforts to expand LTRA investments in the Portland metro area through the new regional Supportive Housing Services program, but we know that there are countless individuals and families across Oregon facing homelessness who would greatly benefit from the swift and flexible access to housing stability that LTRA provides.

As Oregon Center for Public Policy stated in their 2019 report⁵ detailing the benefits of LTRA programs, "Oregon's statewide housing crisis demands a powerful, rapid response." As we confront the long-term economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that ensuring our most vulnerable community members are housed is more important than ever. On behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, I urge you to support HB 3184.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marisa Espinoza
Public Policy Coordinator
Northwest Pilot Project

³ Long Term Rent Assistance Program Evaluation Final Report (2019), Center for Outcomes Research and Education. https://www.nwpilotproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CORE_LRA-Final-Report.pdf

⁴ The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Rental Homes (2021), National Low Income Housing Coalition. <https://reports.nlihc.org/gap>

⁵ A State Rent Assistance Program Would Strengthen Oregon Communities (2019), Oregon Center for Public Policy. https://www.ocpp.org/media/uploads/pdf/2019/09/Statewide_Rent_Assist_FINAL_.pdf