



HOUSING ALLIANCE

April 15, 2021

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to express our support for HB 2006A, which will support the siting of shelters in communities in more parts of our state, and addresses a critical need for safe shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of more than ninety organizations from all parts of the state. Our members have come together with the knowledge that housing opportunity is the foundation on which all of our success is built – individual success as students, parents, workers, and community members as well as the success of our communities. We represent a diverse set of voices including affordable housing developers, residents of affordable housing, local jurisdictions, and organizations working to meet basic needs in every corner of our state.

All Oregonians deserve a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

We know that prior to the pandemic, many seniors, families, and people who experience disabilities are paying too much of their income towards rent, and may be experiencing housing instability. In Oregon, three out of four households with extremely low incomes pay over half of their income towards rent. When people pay a significant portion of their income towards rent, they have too little money left over for food, medicine, utilities, and an emergency may mean they end up experiencing homelessness.

Oregon also has one of the highest rates of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, meaning they are sleeping outside, in a tent, or a car. In 2019, Oregon Housing and Community Services commissioned a study of shelter¹ in our state, and found that Oregon is one of four states where more than half of people experiencing homelessness don't have access to shelter. In Oregon, 61% of people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered. This high rate is directly due to the lack of availability of shelter in our community. In addition, some people seeking shelter are unable to access it due to barriers in shelter – they cannot stay with their partner or their pet because of shelter capacity or policy.

It is important to note that people of color disproportionately experience homelessness and housing instability due to historic and systemic discrimination in housing and employment, and many other factors. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness are disproportionately people of color, compared to their percentage of the general population.

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/ISD/RA/Oregon-Statewide-Shelter-Study.pdf>

Multnomah County's 2019 Point in Time Count report² notes:

“Institutional, systemic and interpersonal racism are among the structural causes of homelessness. The main consequence is an overrepresentation of communities of color in the homeless population. This means that there are disproportionately high rates of people identifying with various racial and ethnic groups in the homeless population as compared to their share of the general population.

The 2019 PIT Count indicates that people of color as a whole, and people identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Black or African American, in particular, were overrepresented in the HUD homeless population. While some communities, including the Latinx community, do not appear to be overrepresented based on this year's PIT Count data, there are multiple cultural and political factors that organizations working in these communities have identified as likely leading those communities of color to be significantly undercounted in the PIT Count. And as explained earlier, the use of HUD's definition of homelessness, which omits the doubled-up population, further obscures the true level of overrepresentation for many communities of color.”

The national Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC) report on homelessness and disparities notes³: *“Although Black people comprise 13% of the general population in the United States and 26% of those living in poverty, they account for more than 40% of the homeless population suggesting that poverty rates alone do not explain the overrepresentation.”*

Systemic racism and the racism found in housing and employment (and other systems) is one of the structural causes of homelessness. BIPOC communities who disproportionately experience homelessness, and unsheltered homelessness, are more likely to experience the many negative consequences of unsheltered homelessness. A recent study by Portland State University's Homeless Research Action Collaborative found:

“The results of the survey reveal profound racial disparities even in basic answers about who accesses shelter or who pitches tents. More than 1 in 4 people of color slept on the streets without a tent compared to only 1 in 10 people who are white.”⁴

People experiencing homelessness are our neighbors and members of our community.

Sleeping outside is not safe, and providing an opportunity for safety either in shelter or an affordable home is critical. HB 2006A would help address this problem by removing barriers to identifying locations where shelters can be placed. HB 2006A would temporarily remove barriers to siting shelters and require local jurisdictions to allow shelters without regard for land use laws in their communities until June 30, 2022. The emergency our communities are facing should be responded to with bold action by the Legislature.

² <https://multco.us/file/82568/download>, p.5

³ <https://c4innovates.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SPARC-Phase-1-Findings-March-2018.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.streetroots.org/news/2020/12/02/opinion-what-do-people-experiencing-homelessness-need>

The proposal includes important sideboards to ensure that the shelter space is adequate and protects occupants from health or safety concerns, and ensures the organization operating the shelter is qualified or is partnering with an experienced shelter provider. These provisions also require that these shelters be placed within urban growth boundaries or within rural residential lands, as well as preventing shelters in places such as wetlands, helping to add sideboards related to location.

Communities across our state – Corvallis, Portland, Bend, LaGrande, and others – have all struggled to site shelters for a range of reasons. The bold action proposed in HB 2006 will temporarily help support the siting of shelters, in order to address the emergency of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. In addition to these temporary changes in land use laws, HB 5042⁵ recently passed by the Legislature also dedicated financial resources to shelter capacity and navigation centers in specific communities including McMinnville, Roseburg, Bend, Medford, Salem, Multnomah County, and Lane County.

HB 2006A would focus on the creation of shelter with as few barriers as possible, and shelters that operate using best practices. We know that shelter best practices vary depending on who is being served – a shelter for families may need to operate differently than a shelter for youth or a shelter for adults – and our communities need more types of shelter for more people.

Shelter is not a permanent solution to homelessness. We need more shelters to provide a safe place to sleep for people experiencing homelessness, while we work to address our housing needs by creating more safe, stable, and affordable homes.

Our state must respond to the housing challenges our communities are facing by making serious investments in housing opportunity and safety, particularly for people with the lowest incomes in our communities.

We urge your support of HB 2006A.

Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state.

Sincerely,



Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

⁵ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Overview/HB5042>

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
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Aging in the Gorge
Benton Habitat for Humanity
Bienestar
Bradley Angle
BRIDGE Housing
Business for a Better Portland
CASA of Oregon
Central City Concern
Chrisman Development
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Coalition of Community Health Clinics
Coalition of Housing Advocates
College Housing Northwest
Community Action Partnership of Oregon
Community Action Team
Community Alliance of Tenants
Community Development Partners
Community Housing Fund
Community Partners for Affordable Housing
Community Vision
Cornerstone Community Housing
DevNW
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Enterprise Community Partners
Fair Housing Council of Oregon
Farmworker Housing Development Corp.
FOOD for Lane County
Habitat for Humanity of Oregon
Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East
Hacienda CDC
Home Forward
Homes for Good
Housing Authorities of Oregon
Housing Authority of Clackamas County
Housing Development Center
Housing Oregon
Human Solutions
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization

Impact Northwest
Innovative Housing, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance on Poverty
JOIN
Lane County Health and Human Services
League of Oregon Cities
League of Women Voters of Oregon
Lincoln County
Looking Glass Community Services
Mainstream Housing Inc.
Metro
Mid-Columbia Housing Authority
NAYA Family Center
Neighborhood Partnerships
NeighborImpact
NeighborWorks Umpqua
Network for Oregon Affordable Housing
Northwest Housing Alternatives
Northwest Pilot Project
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities
Oregon Food Bank
Our Children Oregon
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Portland: Neighbors Welcome
Proud Ground
Raphael House
REACH CDC
Residents Organizing for Change (ROC) Oregon
Rogue Action Center
Rose CDC
St. Francis Shelter
St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Inc.
ShelterCare
Sisters Habitat for Humanity
Sponsors, Inc.
SquareOne Villages
Street Roots
Think Real Estate
Transition Projects
Washington County
Welcome Home Coalition