



29 April 2021

Oregon State Legislature  
House Committee on Housing  
900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301

**Re: Senate Bill 291 – Racial Justice Council’s Individualized Assessment Housing bill**

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Campos and Morgan, and members of the committee:

My name is Jimmy Jones and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency here in Salem, where we serve people in poverty in Marion and Polk Counties, as well as nine other Oregon counties in some programs. I am also the Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon, which for nearly 40 years has been Oregon’s delivery system for homeless, housing, energy, weatherization and other anti-poverty programs. My agency operates the ARCHES Project here in Salem, which is one of the most well-known, widely respected and innovative homeless service models in Oregon. We also operate a jail re-entry program, Community Action Re-Entry Services, which connects those exiting incarceration to housing and employment. And I am, as well, a member of the Housing Subcommittee on the Governor’s Council for Racial Justice.

We write in support of Senate Bill 291, which will reduce barriers to housing stability for Oregonians with a criminal history. Too often for rental housing, current law allows applications to be denied based on criminal history. We know that criminal history is not an indicator of a good tenant. In fact, housing instability is a predictor of recidivism.

The bill allows landlords to review the circumstances of individual’s previous involvement with the criminal justice system and whether an applicant’s history is *relevant* to their ability to be a good tenant. In my work in homeless services, I have met more than 5,000 homeless and housing unstable Oregonians. Many have criminal backgrounds that needlessly and callously deny them the basic human dignity that comes with housing. After generations of systemic racism in law enforcement and sentencing, this is a unique opportunity to right an historical injustice, and make the very elemental human right of housing available to all Oregonians, in a just and equitable policy. Without the kinds of measures we see here in Senate Bill 291, our homeless crisis will grow more grave. There will be more homeless men, women, and children. With it, there will be a better chance for those exiting incarceration. To find good work that pays a living wage. And it will interdict the process of generational poverty by keeping families together, people in their jobs, and children in their schools.

A yes vote on Senate Bill 291 is one more step on the road to a just, equitable, and decent society, where we hold everyone accountable for their actions, but also extend grace, love, and compassion for those who have paid for their transgressions. And it demonstrates our commitment to the shared humanity with people of color, who have been disproportionately impacted by inequities in our criminal justice system.

Respectfully,



Jimmy Jones  
Executive Director