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12 February 2021

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To: House Committee on Housing

**RE: Oregon House Bill 2842, the Healthy Homes Act**

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Campos, Vice-Chair Morgan, and members of the Committee,

Guided by the values and expertise of medicine and public health, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. We are an organization of over 2,800 health professionals and public health advocates statewide working collaboratively with community partners to educate and advocate for societal and policy change that protects human health at the local, state, national, and international level. We seek a healthy, just, and peaceful world for present and future generations.

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We enthusiastically support the passage of House Bill 2842, the Oregon Healthy Homes Act, and encourage you to vote yes on this bill.

It is difficult to overstate the range of health benefits yielded by home repairs and energy efficiency retrofits. Some are quite obvious: a well-insulated home is easier to keep warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Sealing off drafts and fixing structural damage reduces exposure to mold and air contaminants that cause or exacerbate respiratory ailments like asthma and COPD. Far too many Oregonians without good home insulation in the summer of 2020 could not properly take shelter from wildfire smoke that temporarily made the air in our state the deadliest to breathe in the world.

Other benefits are more subtle: economic stability and the built environment are two of the social determinants of health, that is, the conditions that influence individual and group differences in health status



Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

*The US affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize*

4110 SE Hawthorne Blvd. #758 Portland, OR 97214

Tel: 503-274-2720 info@oregonpsr.org www.oregonpsr.org

and outcomes. Low-income households may spend up to 20% of their monthly income on energy bills, compared to the overall average of 3.5% for other households.<sup>1</sup> 4.3% of U.S. health care costs can be attributed to inefficient & unhealthy housing from causes such as lead poisoning and asthma-related illnesses.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, reducing energy demand aids in reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, the pollution from which caused a staggering 8.7 million deaths globally in 2018 according to new peer-reviewed research in the journal *Environmental Research*.<sup>3</sup>

Because home retrofits can be a large out-of-pocket expense, many low-income Oregonians cannot afford vital repairs or do not have control over the conditions of their homes if they are renters. Some existing low-income weatherization funds do not apply broadly enough to cover all the types of specific repairs that may be needed to improve the health of the home environment. House Bill 2842 is focused on serving precisely those who cannot afford repairs and will help fill gaps in existing programs.

The benefits of energy savings, avoided health care costs, and improved health outcomes are so great that we must take action towards ensuring that no Oregonian is left out. The data show that weatherizations and home repairs work well in driving down energy costs, improving indoor air quality and comfort, and boosting economic development via home remodeling jobs. House Bill 2842 can help us to deliver these benefits to low-income Oregonians who are struggling amidst a multitude of crises.

We hope that you all will take the opportunity to support this forward-thinking, much-needed bill that will be a key component of providing relief to Oregonians who need it most. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Damon Motz-Storey

Healthy Climate Program Director

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psr.org/blog/resource/webinar-energy-efficiency-for-healthier-homes/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0013935121000487>

