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To: House Committee on Human Services
From: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center
Date: February 23rd, 2021
Re: HB 2004 and 2006

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

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this written testimony in support of HB 2004 and HB 2006. OLC is grateful for the Speaker's leadership in bringing this bill forward. We thank you for your consideration and urge your support.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Helping families maintain safe, stable housing is a critical part of our work. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy. Across the state, in urban and rural areas, access to safe, stable, and affordable housing has become one of the most important issues facing our clients.

The vast majority of our client community is rent burdened – one emergency away from homelessness – or are houseless themselves, living either doubled-up or in shelter, or living outside without adequate shelter. The pandemic has exacerbated this situation, and currently more than half of Oregon's population experiencing homelessness is unsheltered, exposed to the elements and myriad public health and safety crises.

It is important to note the disproportionate impact that our state's housing crisis is having on people of color, who as a result of long-standing systemic racism are more housing insecure and more likely to suffer unsheltered homelessness than other Oregonians. Due to a history of structural racism in the form of zoning exclusion, gentrification, lack of access to capital, and displacement, stable and affordable housing opportunities have been denied to Oregonians of color.¹ Black Oregonians are twice as likely to live in poverty, two times more likely than white people to rent their homes instead of owning them², and three times more likely to experience homelessness because of the impact of racism in our housing and employment systems.

¹ <https://www.streetroots.org/news/2020/12/02/opinion-what-do-people-experiencing-homelessness-need>

² https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/citizen_engagement/Reports/2019-JARDHO-Addressing%20Barriers%20to%20Home%20Ownership%20for%20People%20of%20Color%20in%20Oregon.pdf

I also want to note the particular impact that survivors of domestic violence are experiencing as a result of our current housing crisis, and during this pandemic. Domestic and sexual violence have always been significant drivers of homelessness. Nationally and locally, rates and severity of domestic violence are escalating – the need for emergency shelter has never been greater for survivors. Oregon’s domestic violence shelter capacity was limited prior to this pandemic, and is even more so now, with social distancing requirements and increased need.

Oregon has taken remarkable steps to help address our housing crisis, but our solutions are not yet to scale, and we have more to do.

HB 2004 and 2006 would enable communities to move quickly to build up desperately needed shelter capacity. The bills would remove barriers to siting shelters, addressing common logistical problems faced in many jurisdictions by temporarily adjusting land use laws, within important sideboards. The bills would encourage best practices in the provision of low-barrier shelter access. Funding and technical support would be provided to ensure high quality services to the community, with navigation assistance in several communities to help break down barriers to wrap around services for those in shelter.

In response to these emergency times, emergency measures are necessary. Together, these bills will promote safety for the thousands of Oregonian who have no choice but to sleep in their vehicle, on the ground, or on the streets - risking their lives while they pursue scarce options for permanent, stable housing.

Thank you for your work and for your commitment to housing stability for Oregonians.