



HOUSING ALLIANCE

February 9, 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 SB 278, which will make a change to the Rent Guarantee Fund and help more tenants access rental housing.

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 non-profit 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. Today, we simply don't have enough affordable homes for people who need them, and vacancy rates have dropped precipitously towards zero in communities across Oregon over the past decade. People – our neighbors and members of our community – are struggling with homelessness, housing instability, rent burdens, and to make ends meet and put food on the table, particularly during this pandemic.

We know that for tenants who have barriers to renting – such as an eviction on their record, debt to a past landlord, a criminal record, or other barriers – it can be exceptionally difficult to find a landlord willing to rent an apartment to them.

One solution that addresses these barriers are renter education programs. Renter education programs are offered in counties throughout Oregon, both rural and urban. These programs equip participants with the knowledge they need to be successful renters by educating on their rights and responsibilities, as well as skills such as communicating with their landlord. By building their renters' skills and knowledge, these programs build stronger, more successful relationships between landlords and tenants. And for tenants with barriers to renting, such as a poor credit or rental history, the completion of a renter education helps give them a second chance.

In 2017, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2724, in order to help address those barriers. That bill created a Guarantee Fund to amplify the power of tenant education classes. The guarantee fund is available to tenants who have completed a tenant education course, like Rent Well, and:

- Have an income at or below 60% of the area median income;
- Currently are facing housing stability or homelessness, and
- Can document a barrier to renting an apartment.

Once someone completes the Rent Well class, and identifies a landlord that is willing to rent to them, the Landlord registers for the guarantee. If, at any time during the first year of tenancy, the renter is either evicted for cause and has debt or damages the rental unit, or leaves with unpaid debt, the landlord may make a claim on the fund. In Oregon's extremely competitive rental markets, this fund can increase rental opportunities for tenants with barriers to housing.

The fund is carefully managed by both Rent Well programs as well as Oregon Housing and Community Services. The landlord must submit verification, including documentation, receipts, potentially photos, and other proof of the cost.

Since the creation of the fund by the Legislature in 2017, nearly 2,000 tenants have become eligible for the fund, and there have been six paid claims.

In the original legislation, the bill outlined that there is a \$5,000 lifetime limit for each landlord to make against the fund. We intended that this would guard against mis-use of the fund, and ensure the fund is available to tenants for the long term. Unfortunately, this has meant that landlords are hesitant to rent to more than one Rent Well graduate at a time, which is not our preferred outcome.

The change before you today in SB 278 would allow a \$5,000 per residential tenant limit. This would help encourage landlords to rent to more than one Rent Well graduate at a time, and we are confident that the other oversight and checks and balances that were created will continue to ensure there is no misuse of the fund.

We encourage your support for SB 278. Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state.

Sincerely,



Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
211info
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
Church Women United of Lane County
City of Beaverton
City of Eugene
City of Forest Grove
City of Hillsboro
City of Hood River
City of Portland
City of Tigard
Clackamas County
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