

February 2, 2022

Senator Kayse Jama, Chair  
Senate Committee on Housing and Development  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Multnomah County Strongly Supports SB 1536

Chair Jama and Members of the Committee:

Multnomah County asks for your support of Senate Bill 1536 (SB 1536). This critical bill includes life-saving measures that will help address some of the risks associated with heat events for Oregon's most vulnerable communities.

The last two years cast a light on Oregonians' increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. The state experienced unprecedented loss of life as a result of heat during the summer of 2021. The heat dome event impacted all Oregonians, but renters were especially hit hard. Clearly climate change is making severe weather events more frequent and more extreme. As Oregon's summers grow hotter and drier, stressors like heat and smoke will continue to disproportionately impact already vulnerable communities, exacerbating inequities created by systemic racism, intergenerational poverty, income inequality, and federal disinvestment in social services. SB 1536 includes important policy changes and funding to mitigate those impacts - and save lives.

The June 2021 heat dome caused unprecedented health impacts in Multnomah County. We lost 69 community members, and visits to hospital emergency departments for heat illness surged to more than 30 times above normal levels. Emergency medical services were overextended and struggled to keep up with the volume of need. Some members of our community were especially vulnerable to heat illness and death, an experience that is supported by scientific research. A recent study found strong effects from heat on children<sup>1</sup>, and we know that heat can also affect older adults, pregnant people, and people with chronic health conditions. The health impacts of

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<sup>1</sup> Bernstein, A. S., Sun, S., Weinberger, K. R., Spangler, K. R., Sheffield, P. E., & Wellenius, G. A. (2022). Warm Season and Emergency Department Visits to US Children's Hospitals. *Environmental health perspectives*, 130(1), 017001.

the 2021 heat dome were preventable. To avoid similar impacts in the future, Oregonians need the changes and funding SB 1536 provides.

SB 1536 limits restrictions on portable cooling devices by landlords, homeowners associations, condominium associations and local governments to ensure tenants are able to use devices they have. We heard from some tenants last summer that they were prohibited from using devices they had by landlords who cited cosmetic or safety concerns that could have been addressed. The bill also requires certain landlords to provide community spaces for cooling and to make accommodations to allow tenants who are medically vulnerable or mobility challenged, older adults or young children.

SB 1536 also provides \$15 million in funding to landlords to install heat pumps/air conditioners that would provide crucial relief from those stressors to medically and financially vulnerable Oregonians. The bill would help keep people safe as apartments without air conditioning do not cool down at night during periods of warm overnight temperatures, driving heat-related illness during heat events.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, SB 1536 is consistent with one of the strategies to help people stay safe in place that our report *June 2021 Extreme Heat Event: Preliminary Findings and Action Steps* identified: scaling existing partnerships, programs, and policy efforts to install cooling systems in low-income housing.<sup>3</sup>

This bill includes urgent measures to keep Oregonians who are tenants safe and prevent deaths. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and ask for your support of SB 1536.

Sincerely,

/s/John Wasiutynski

John Wasiutynski

Director

Multnomah County

Office of Sustainability

/s/Peggy Samolinski

Peggy Samolinski

Director

Youth & Family Services Division

Dept. of County Human Services

/s/Andrea Hamberg

Andrea Hamberg

Interim Director

Multnomah County

Environmental Health Services

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<sup>2</sup> Multnomah County, *Preliminary Review on Excessive Heat Deaths in Multnomah County* at 11 (Jul. 13, 2021), available at <https://www.multco.us/preliminaryreview-excessive-heat-deaths-multnomah-county-june-2021>.

<sup>3</sup> Multnomah County, *June 2021 Extreme Heat Event: Preliminary Findings and Action Steps* at 15 (Aug. 18, 2021), available at [https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/June2021\\_Heat\\_Event-Preliminary\\_Findings-08\\_21%20%281%29.pdf](https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/June2021_Heat_Event-Preliminary_Findings-08_21%20%281%29.pdf).