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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure: SB1518

The way our cities have been designed over the past 30 years has created a stock of buildings that are responsible for nearly half the energy use and about one-third of the greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon. Over the next 30 years, the state projects that 700,000 new homes and apartments, and 800 million square feet of new commercial building space will be built. In the face of a climate emergency that is putting our communities at risk from pollution, wildfires, and record heat waves, it is critical that new buildings be designed to both reduce the carbon footprint of our built environment and provide protection from the health impacts of worsening natural disasters and air pollution.

Cities have asked for the opportunity to lead the way in decarbonizing buildings and several of Oregon's largest cities have already expressed that they would adopt the Reach Code.

While there has been growing interest in high-performance buildings and renewable energy, local jurisdictions (cities and counties) across the state do not yet have the ability to enforce higher sustainability standards for new construction. Despite this, numerous developers, architects, and builders are already familiar with the methods that will take building operations to a higher standard and there are many local and national organizations and financial incentives available to offer support in realizing less energy-intensive buildings.

The Reach Code bill has many community sponsors in addition to support from environmental advocates. In 2021, Hacienda CDC, Verde, Central City Concern, and KOR Community Trust, all non-profits working with affordable housing, supported the bill. From their experience working to fund and deliver affordable housing projects, these organizations have collectively stated that cost savings on utility bills from energy-efficient features in new buildings will offer greater affordability and stability for low-income owners and tenants.

Oregon's current energy policies for buildings are preventing meaningful climate action. The Reach Code will require buildings to have a reduced carbon impact and be more resilient to the already present effects of climate change like wildfire smoke, heat events, and air pollution while at the same time reducing the energy costs for homeowners and renters alike.

This bill is the legislature's best chance to significantly reduce future emissions this session and needs to be a priority for passage.