



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

February 9, 2022

Members of the House Committee on Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 4051

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Campos, Vice-Chair Morgan, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, to express our support for provisions within the -3 amendments to HB 4051. Specifically, we would like to comment on Sections 1 and 2, which extend the Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities in Oregon and require several additional reports to support the implementation of this work, which began when the Task Force was created through HB 2100 during the 2021 Oregon Legislative Session.

Northwest Pilot Project is a nonprofit agency serving seniors experiencing housing instability and homelessness in Multnomah County. A representative of Northwest Pilot Project also served on the Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities. In our work to end homelessness for older adults, we have learned that we cannot accomplish our goals without confronting the urgent need to address systemic racial inequality and how it manifests in both the problem of our housing and homelessness crisis as well as in our policy and programmatic solutions.

Due to structural racism, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities are disproportionately represented among the vulnerable seniors we serve. We recognize that older adult homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked to a long and continued history of race-based housing and economic inequality in the US. Every day, housing and homeless service providers in our region confront the long-term effects of profound injustices and racist public policy that have created stark racial disparities in housing access and stability.

These growing racial disparities in homelessness have become more apparent through our 50-plus years of providing housing stabilization services to seniors, and we have committed organizational resources to developing culturally responsive services and racially equitable policies and practices within our programs. However, we know this commitment is only one

step, and that BIPOC older adults should have access to culturally specific services, and that mainstream and dominant culture organizations like ours cannot fill the same important role as culturally specific providers. We also know that in order to operationalize racial equity values in all housing and homelessness services, additional accountability metrics and strategic work towards overall systems change and improvement are necessary.

The Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities, working in collaboration with a neutral third-party facilitator and neutral third-party contractor working as a Discovery Team, engaged over the course of several weeks in late 2021 and early 2022 to fulfill the directions of the Legislature. In our participation in the Task Force, we shared in a collaborative process to develop a set of recommendations aimed at addressing the structural causes and power imbalances that perpetuate racial inequities, in spite of our dedicated collective efforts to end homelessness. We analyzed the results of interviews and a survey conducted by the Discovery Team with stakeholders, which highlighted how Oregonians of color especially see a need for more racial equity work within our homelessness service system.

We also considered data findings, which tell a troubling story about how racial and ethnic disparities persist among people experiencing homelessness, resulting in American Indian/ Alaska Native Oregonians being represented in homelessness more than four times their share of the total state population, and Black/ African American Oregonians being represented more than three times their share of the total state population. Then, we evaluated examples of best practices currently in operation in other states, where innovative approaches to systems change and continuous improvement efforts can be replicated or adapted to meet the unique needs of Oregonians struggling with housing instability and homelessness.

Ultimately, we created recommendations reflective of collaboration among a Task Force that represented a range of perspectives, including legislators, OHCS, the Governor's Racial Justice Council, Community Action Agencies, culturally specific homeless service providers, urban and rural service providers, and people with lived experience of homelessness. These recommendations are responsive to the needs and values of a community grappling with a housing crisis that reaches every corner and community of our state, but which also reinforces existing structural racial inequality and thus disproportionately impacts Oregonians of color. NWPP believes that these recommendations are critical to the strategic, long-term work that we must prioritize in order to both eliminate racial disparities in homelessness *and* end homelessness for all populations.

We support the -3 amendments to HB 4051, which include an extension of the Task Force to continue this critical and transformative work to address racial disparities in homelessness. On behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, we strongly recommend that the committee support this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Golino de Lovato
Executive Director

Marisa Espinoza
Policy and Systems Advocate
Member, Task Force on Homelessness and Racial
Disparities in Oregon