



SO Health-E

Advocating for Health Equity

February 28, 2023

Representative Maxine Dexter
Chair, House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
900 Court St NE, H-283
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for SB 603

Dear Chair Jama, Vice Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

SO Health-E, the Regional Health Equity Coalition (RHEC) serving Jackson and Josephine Counties, urges support for SB 603.

This bill aligns with the top priorities emerging from community engagement in our region that centers the voices of people of color, wildfire survivors, LGBTQ+ people, Spanish speaking households with children, people living with a disability, students, and low-income people living in Southern Oregon.

We support the creation of the People's Housing Assistance Fund Demonstration Program as a much-needed intervention addressing root causes of housing instability and homelessness, key drivers of health equity.

We also support the aspect of the bill which funds a PSU study to generate much needed new data on the impact of root cause interventions such as cash assistance to address health equity issues such as housing instability and homelessness in Oregon.

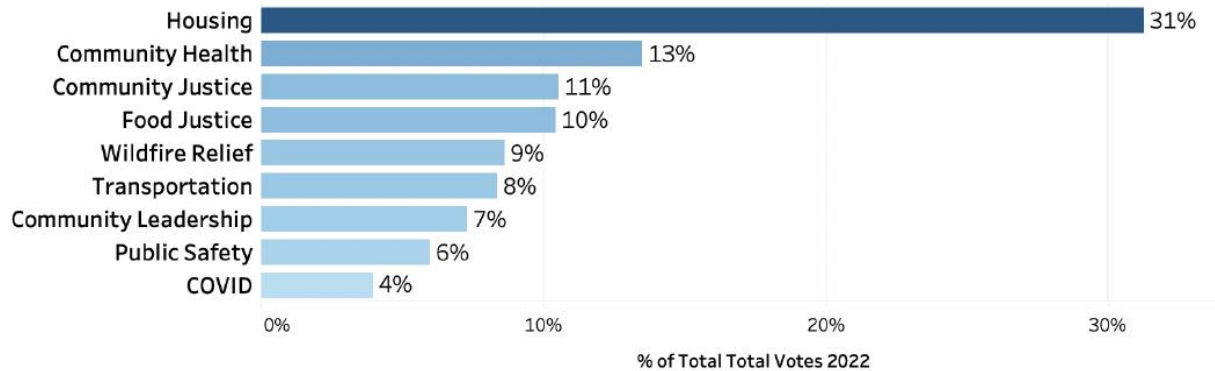
We are also very pleased to see the -1 amendments, including the important clarification that "payments received from the program are exempt from personal income taxation imposed by this state under ORS chapter 316 and may not count as income in the determination of eligibility for any needs based benefits or assistance provided with state funds only." This was a concern raised by our policy committee when reviewing the bill for equity impacts.

In 2022, SO Health-E did a community priorities survey of residents in Jackson and Josephine Counties, prioritizing the voices of people of color, wildfire survivors, LGBTQ+ people, Spanish speaking households with children, people living with a disability, students, and low-income people.

The #1 issue that community members prioritized was housing. Specifically, we heard a lot about housing affordability, accessible housing for those living with a disability, and systemic barriers to accessing housing such as racism in the housing rental and homebuying markets.

Total Votes by Category.

Housing was voted by survey participants as their #1 priority.



We believe that this bill is a promising pilot program, which at scale could be a powerful tool to address longstanding inequities in Oregon’s housing market that have kept people of color, LGBTQ+ people, people living with a disability, and people working low paying jobs at risk of losing housing, being forced to live in unsafe or inadequate housing that does not meet their needs, or living unsheltered.

Oregon’s housing crisis is a health equity crisis and a civil rights issue, and must be addressed with innovative new approaches. We believe that investments in new programs like the People’s Housing Assistance Fund Demonstration Program and the data SB 603 would generate to guide future policy making are important steps in that direction.

We urge strong support for SB 603, and ask that it be passed out of committee as soon as possible with the -1 amendments and with a “do pass” recommendation.

Thank you for your service to Oregonians on the Senate Housing Committee,

Sincerely,

Michelle Glass
Policy and Advocacy Coordinator,
SO Health-E, the Regional Health Equity Coalition serving Jackson and Josephine Counties