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To: Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
From: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center
Date: March 2nd, 2023
Re: Support SB 5011, OHCS Budget

Chair Woods, Co-Chair Gomberg, and members of the Subcommittee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Governor Kotek's Requested Oregon Housing and Community Services 2023-2025 biennium budget.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. The majority of our client community is rent burdened – one emergency away from homelessness – or are houseless themselves, living either doubled-up or in shelter, or living outside without adequate shelter.

The proposed investments in Senate Bill 5511 would provide critical funding in the OHCS budget in order to address three key priorities for our client community:

- Prevent homelessness;
- Rehouse people experiencing homelessness; and
- Build and preserve more affordable housing units statewide.

We are extremely grateful to Governor Kotek, legislative leadership, and this committee for recognizing the importance of moving swiftly with an urgent homelessness package to begin to address immediate needs in HB 5019. **OLC supports the recommended budget in HB 5011 for the 2023-25 biennium, with requested additional investments of \$100 million in homelessness prevention as set out below.**

As we work towards long-term solutions by increasing housing supply, and as we work to address the immediate crisis of people living outside, we must also take swift and decisive action to prevent more homelessness. If we don't invest adequately in prevention, our efforts at intervention will be undermined.

OLC's highest priority investment request is for \$100 million in POP #90 to ensure access to emergency rent assistance and eviction prevention. The bulk of these dollars should go to community action agencies and culturally specific programs across the state, to ensure localized access to help when need arises. Rent assistance is a "tried and true" method of homelessness prevention that has never been adequately funded. We seek support and stability and adequate investment in this method of intervention, without siphoning resources for un-tried pilot projects. Now is the time to double down where we know we can be effective at preventing displacement.



As you know, Oregon is 4th in the nation of people per capita experiencing homelessness. We have the 4th lowest rental vacancy rate in the country and renters are extremely rent burdened in our state. Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes. According to the state economist, more than 50% of Oregon renters do not have enough money left over for food, medicine, and basic necessities. The situation is more serious for Black Oregonians, who are 30% less likely to be homeowners and more likely to be renters due to the legacy of historic policies that blocked Black people from purchasing and owning property in our state.

There have been an average of 2,178 eviction filings per month every month since October of last year, and over 86 % of these filings are due to nonpayment.¹ Each of these cases represents an Oregon household or family, at great risk of homelessness and the very real threat of having to sleep outside, in a vehicle, or in a shelter. **Rent assistance is the single most effective tool at preventing the vast majority of evictions – making sure that landlords get paid and tenants stay housed.**

One particular homelessness prevention effort I'd like to mention is the Eviction Prevention Rapid Response (EPRR) program. Oregon Law Center has been a key partner with the Agency in the implementation of this program, in which our attorneys assisting low-income tenants in eviction court have accessed flexible and rapid EPRR funds in hundreds of cases to cure their case, get their landlord paid and keep the tenant stably housed. This program is narrowly targeted – only to people in active eviction proceedings, but has been very effective. 36% of recipients were BIPOC Oregonians, and 43% lived in the metro area, while 57% were from outside the metro area. This program is fast, and it is flexible, and these aspects are critical to its success.

When we have been able to connect our clients with EPRR and other forms of rent assistance within an immediate turnaround, we have been highly successful at getting payments to landlords and keeping tenants housed, kids in school, and communities intact.

In closing, I thank the Subcommittee for your work on the single most critical set of issues facing every community in our state. We respectfully ask for your support of an \$100 million investment in POP 90 for eviction prevention resources. Rent assistance and emergency eviction prevention funding is a tried and true method of homelessness prevention that must be scaled up and stably available for the next biennium. This is a smart investment today that will avoid higher human, financial, and societal cost tomorrow. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ Data pulled from Oregon Judicial Department public records. See <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/50686>