



House Committee on Judiciary
Chair Jason Kropf
Vice-Chairs Andersen & Wallan

Honorable Chair Kropf, Vice-chairs Andersen & Wallan, and distinguished committee members,

As Mayor of Lake Oswego I am grateful to provide this testimony in support of HB 3294. Thank you to my representative, Rep. Nguyen, and to his co-sponsors for bringing this important legislation forward.

The conversation of racially discriminatory language in title instruments is one present in communities across the U.S., including in communities here in Oregon, and has been an issue important to member of my community. Our Lake Oswego City website contains a page dedicated to instructions for removing racist language from deeds, however, residents attempting the current process find it cumbersome, confusing and ultimately unproductive. Furthermore, the current “solution” is insufficient in that it does not remove these relics of racist documents in question from the chain of title. HB 3294 now proposes a more powerful tool to index and replace the document containing discriminatory clauses, no longer making them the primary official public record. This is significant.

Our predecessors used legal means to insert these clauses into deeds and home owners association CCRs nationwide, and now we have the opportunity to use legal means to restore the rights of all our community members regardless of race to be free from the indignity of this language and the deep hurt that comes with it.

In my community achieving home ownership is extremely difficult for even those from the most privileged background, and for our communities of color, especially for Black Americans, rates of home ownership lag well behind those for white Americans. It is therefore quite a significant moment of pride, happiness and joy to come to surpass what are inherent systemwide challenges to achieve homeownership only to review as a step in that purchase documents highlighting in clear black and white what is essentially the racist root which caused that enduring hardship to begin with. It is easy to say that these words are mere artifacts, but there is no doubt the real life impacts of these exclusionary clauses is still felt to this day, and it is that impact we all as state and community leaders continue to address in our policy making at every turn. While the illegality of the clauses does not prevent homeownership based on race, the remaining

presence of the language casts the darkest and most subversive shadows of hurt and doubt on those it impacts, especially when legislative solutions exist to remove it that are not implemented.

It may be convenient to rest on what are now disclaimers in title documents proclaiming these clauses null and void, and it is even true that, in Lake Oswego's case, Oregon Iron and Steel filed a waiver to any rights of enforcement of these racially discriminatory deed clauses in the 1950s. Yet there remain plenty of recent examples of government reversing hard fought for protections by Americans to be free from discrimination in healthcare based on gender and to exercise the right to love the person you love. We see today that waivers, disclaimers and such are weak promises to members of our communities and it is actual physical changes such as what this legislation provides that take an important step in ensuring all Oregonians know they are just as free to rightfully enjoy the benefits of home ownership and to be truly at home in all joyous ways just as any other regardless of their race.

Thank you for hearing this testimony today and for working to make all our communities more inclusive, welcoming and safe for every person. Please support HB 3294 and move it forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Buck", with a large, stylized initial "J" and a horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mayor Joe Buck