



Oregon Law Center

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Public Hearing before the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness

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In Support of HB 3462

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in strong support of HB 3462, the Emergency Housing for All Act, to ensure equity in access to emergency housing in the wake of a disaster.

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 recent devastating wildfires that ravaged communities across the state meant that many of our friends and neighbors lost everything. Emergency responders were often the only resource for victims, and communities are still very much in the process of recovery, years after the initial disaster. Low-income Oregonians had fewer resources, faced greater barriers to recovery and were more reliant on emergency service providers for safety, security, housing, and basic needs.

In Southern Oregon, many survivors of the wildfires are non-English speaking, and many faced barriers to accessing important federal relief programs due to immigration status requirements. During the first 18-24 months after the 2020 wildfires, our program received numerous calls from survivors and community partners in Jackson County, seeking help in accessing emergency resources. Too often, victims were ineligible for assistance despite clear need, or faced barriers to accessing assistance due to language barriers.

The unavailability of disaster relief based on immigration status is an example of systemic racism and injustice that inflicts lasting harm on valued community members.

The goal of HB 3462 is to ensure equitable access to emergency housing assistance provided in the wake of a disaster. The bill is a necessary foundation for the legislature's effort to prepare and protect our communities during an emergency response. Emergency response for ALL displaced individuals after a disaster is necessary to ensure the well-being of our communities, our workforce, and our economy. As Oregon builds its emergency response systems, HB 3462 will help ensure that what we build is fair, equitable, and accessible for all our communities.

We understand that the proponents will be fine-tuning some technical amendments and we would be pleased to collaborate in that process if useful.

For the above reasons, we urge your support. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.