



OREGON HOUSING *and*
COMMUNITY SERVICES

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February 13, 2024

Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Legislative Audits
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301-4048

Re: Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance Program

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez and Members of the Joint Committee on Legislative Audits,

Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) appreciates the time and attention of both the Secretary of State Audits Division and this Committee in reviewing the Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance Program (OERAP). OERAP was a one-of-a-kind program that the agency established in less than four months during a global pandemic. During its lifetime, OHCS distributed [more than \\$426 million to 67,522 households](#), helping tens of thousands of Oregonians get back on their feet, supporting students learning in a hybrid environment, and likely preventing thousands of evictions. Our mission was to make everyday life easier for Oregonians by ensuring housing stability.

From the program's onset, OHCS worked to prioritize assistance for at-risk landlords and tenants to prevent homelessness. In pursuing this mission, we were clear-eyed that this would require a shift to our operations and mindset, all in service to the people of Oregon. This approach prioritized humanity ahead of traditional program development rigor, such as pre-establishing robust internal controls, thoroughly testing new IT systems, and prolonged decision-making when initial delivery systems didn't achieve the required outcomes.

OHCS had the chance to discuss this work further with the Committee yesterday, but wanted to follow up with additional details on a few key areas:

Program Lookback and Reflection on Audit Findings

In an effort to reflect on key learnings from the implementation of the Oregon Emergency Rental Assistance Program (OERAP), OHCS completed an after-action report. Additionally, OHCS's research team will evaluate the program and produce a report that will include interviews with Community Action Agencies (CAAs), community-based organizations, and Public Partnerships to document strengths and opportunities and provide program evaluation to inform future decision-making. We expect that evaluation to be completed by December 2024.

In addition to reflection on the program that has occurred internally at Oregon Housing and Community Services, the agency has participated in national efforts to provide reflections on Oregon's role in the national Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) landscape to better understand national trends, successes,



and challenges and Oregon's place among them, including the [White House Summit on Eviction Prevention](#).

In early 2023, the agency participated in a survey conducted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) and the University of Pennsylvania's Housing Initiative at Penn (HIP). [They produced a report titled "Continuing Emergency Rental Assistance: How Jurisdictions Are Building on Treasury's ERA Program,"](#) which examines which ERA program elements have been retained by state and local governments.

Additionally, OHCS contributed to a study meant to understand the experiences of tenants and landlords who participated in the ERA program. As part of this effort, OHCS partnered with the University of Pennsylvania's Housing Initiative at Penn (HIP) to distribute a survey to Oregonians who participated in OERAP to capture data surrounding their experiences. [The report, titled "Beyond Housing Stability: Understanding Tenant and Landlord Experiences and the Impact of Emergency Rental Assistance,"](#) offers key insights into how Oregon compares with other programs nationwide.

Finally, Portland State University is evaluating OERAP as an eviction diversion program. They are processing data now, and OHCS will meet with them later this month to discuss the scope of this project.

OHCS Preparedness for the Work Ahead

Alongside OHCS' ongoing core responsibilities, we have been trusted with an opportunity of historic proportions to reduce and prevent homelessness and increase housing production across the state. Together, OHCS and the Legislature are making transformative investments to improve how we deliver results that strategically increase affordable housing across the state and produce equitable outcomes. The work ahead will require ingenuity, resourcefulness, and commitment to do the tough, big things we know we must do.

OHCS has made significant progress in our work to address housing needs across the continuum. In late 2022, we released a [Progress Report](#) to update the agency's substantial progress in meeting the goals outlined in our [2019 Statewide Housing Plan](#), which outlines six priorities and goals intended to better meet Oregon's housing needs. At the time of the release of that Progress Report, OHCS had already met two of the six goals, including funding over 1,200 units of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and funding over 3,612 affordable housing units in rural Oregon, with work to meet the others underway. That work has only continued in the time following the report.

OHCS has also made significant strides in increasing staffing to meet this moment in time. In the 2015-17 and 2017-19 biennia, OHCS had nearly 150 staff positions. In the 2019-21 biennium, staff positions increased to over 250. In the 2021-23 biennium, the agency had over 450 positions, and by the end of the 2023-25 biennium, we expect to have 470 staff positions. As an agency, we are committed to meeting Governor Kotek's expectations for excellent customer service and delivering the results that Oregonians expect from their state government. OHCS' dedicated and talented staff are critical to accomplishing those goals.



As we look forward, OHCS will continue to take steps to incorporate all that has been learned from operating this program and remain focused on solutions to keep Oregonians stably housed before they experience homelessness. We deeply appreciate the partnership of the Legislature in our work to serve Oregonians across the housing spectrum and will continue to respond to the mandates set by the people of Oregon.

In partnership,

Andrea Bell
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