

**Testimony to the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
On Housing Policy Concepts Preview**

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Chair Dexter, vice-chair Gamba, members of the committee.

For the record, my name is Karen Lewotsky, and I am the Water Program Director & Rural Partnerships Lead for Oregon Environmental Council.

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

OEC appreciates the opportunity to speak briefly in support of Representative Hartman's emphasis on safe drinking water for residential tenants, including those occupying mobile homes and farmworker housing.

Section 1. Tenants' Rights to Water Testing Results: Water quality reports from drinking water providers and the state should be routinely provided to all properties supplied by those providers as well as to the property owner. The point of such reports is to provide water users with a clear understanding of any issues associated with their drinking water, such as contaminants like nitrates, arsenic and E. coli. These materials should be provided in both English and Spanish. Ideally, options would also exist for non-English, non-Spanish speaking households. Although as a society we seem to be transitioning to on-line access to such materials, delivering physical copies to each residence ensures that those with limited computer skills and/or access are provided with this important information.

When a water provider or the state issues a public notice of a drinking water problem, public notice should be provided directly to residences served by the water provider. In addition, where possible community groups with direct access to specific demographics should be informed so that they can provide outreach to their community members.

Section 2. Domestic Well Water Safety Testing Requirements: Currently, there is no requirement for homes served by domestic wells to have their tap water tested for contaminants. Homeowners can initiate a testing routine for themselves, but tenants are not necessarily aware of the need for such testing or able to conduct and pay for such tests. Rental property owners should have a regular schedule for testing the tap water of their properties and should be required to share the results of those tests with tenants. An explanation of the implication of test results should also be provided.

Where filters or other water quality remediation devices are installed in rental properties, the landlord should be required to share that information with prospective and current tenants. Any water quality remediation or purification devices installed in rental units should be regularly assessed by the landlord or their representatives to be sure the devices are working properly. Where maintenance is needed, such maintenance should be provided at no cost to the tenants.

Section 3. Including Water Quality in Habitability Standards: It seems reasonable to assume that when you rent a house, the water coming out of the indoor taps will be safe to drink. However, that is not a safe assumption in Oregon. Including safe drinking water as a component of statutorily identified habitability standards can help address that problem. Again, full disclosure of drinking water test results should be a part of the rental conversation.

I'd like to add a final observation, which is that we need to be sure that there are means for enforcing whatever provisions are developed to address these problems. Without enforceability, requirements such as these can become well-intended window dressing that hides the problems from view.

Thank you for the opportunity to make these brief comments in support of Representative Hartman's concept paper as it relates to safe drinking water for tenants of rental properties.

OEC encourages this committee to seriously consider how to move forward on these important issues. We look forward to working with Representative Hartman, committee members and others in identifying and implementing effective responses to these challenges.

Thank you for your time.