

Testimony by 350 Salem Oregon
On SB 1537
Feb. 7, 2024

Hello Chair Jama and members of the committee:

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on SB 1537. I am Phil Carver, Co-Coordinator of 350 Salem OR, the Salem chapter of the global climate organization 350.org. We work at the local, state and federal level to advocate for policies that will urgently and effectively address the climate emergency.

350 Salem supports the infrastructure funding and climate-smart housing incentives of SB 1537 with **STRONG OPPOSITION** to the provision (Section 50) that allows large urban growth boundary (UGB) expansions without regard for Oregon's land use laws.

The following are why the bill needs to be amended to remove Section 50:

- The land use program has delivered benefits to Oregonians. Oregon's cities already have more than 10,000 acres of vacant land, designated for residential use, inside their UGBs. These existing lands need investments in some or all infrastructure – roads, sewers, water, sidewalks – to unlock them for housing production.
- Investing in these existing lands is the most effective step the state can take now to quickly make large parcels “shovel-ready” for producing housing.
- **The land inside current UGBs should not have to compete with UGB expansions for scarce infrastructure dollars.**
- Spending limited infrastructure dollars goes further and faster inside UGBs to produce more houses than spending those dollars at the edge of the UGB. Residential lands already inside UGBs are often closer to existing infrastructure or have some infrastructure in place, but need just a bit more. This means less cost and takes less time to get more homes on the ground than through UGB expansion.
- Adding more land at the edge exacerbates existing infrastructure funding gaps and fails to make the most of the land we have. It's not an efficient use of public dollars and it's not fair to the communities that already have lands waiting for those investments.
- Building at the edge puts more people farther away from the services, stores, and jobs they need. That requires more driving, which makes living at the edge much less affordable.

- Building at the edge exacerbates inequality and racial and economic injustice. Existing properties inside the UGB subsidize infrastructure investments on the fringe. Instead, policies should open up more housing in existing neighborhoods for those who have been racially redlined and economically excluded from areas of opportunity: people with lower incomes, people of color, Black people, Indigenous people, and people on fixed incomes.

- More driving means more greenhouse gas emissions. More roads and pavement worsen the heat island effect and increase stormwater runoff that floods people downstream. Building on the fringe paves over carbon-sequestering farmlands and natural areas.

Building at the edge increases climate change and puts these homes at greater wildfire risk than homes inside existing UGBs.

Please, amend SB 1537 to remove Section 50 that bypasses land use laws to allow large UGB expansions. It's a distraction from real solutions to our housing crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.