

February 12, 2024

Chair, Kayse Jama
Senate Committee on Housing and Development
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Multnomah County in support of SB 1530 and the Stable Homes for Oregon funding package to provide critical funding in the Oregon Housing and Community Services budget in order to:

- Prevent eviction and homelessness;
- Fund emergency shelter services to serve homeless individuals, to ensure shelter capacity during severe weather and to prevent death and other health impacts exacerbated by street homelessness;
- Support low income residents with climate resilience devices;
- Support for economic and housing stability through matching funds to individual development accounts;
- Other supportive housing programs, including alternative home ownership models and treatment and recovery services.

Specifically, we submit this testimony in support of an investment of \$65m to maintain shelter operations statewide and \$45 million for homelessness prevention services statewide. Additionally, we support \$6.5 million to the Urban League of Oregon for culturally specific housing stability services, \$6 million to the Home Fund at Oregon Worker Relief for housing stability services for immigrant Oregonians, and \$2 million for outreach services for residents of expiring affordable housing units.

Preventing homelessness needs to be our shared top priority. These critical investments respond to our current eviction and housing crisis and will help Oregonians of all ages stay housed and stable.

We are extremely grateful to legislative leadership and this committee for recognizing the importance of including a significant eviction prevention, homelessness services, shelter operations, and stabilization package this session to fill critical gaps.

Funding for emergency rent assistance and eviction prevention to community action agencies and culturally specific programs across the state is an essential element of homelessness prevention. These funds continue to be necessary because of our high rate of homelessness, low availability and high cost of rental housing, chronic disparities in homeownership, and the economic uncertainty that Oregon renters continue to live under.

Pandemic emergency rent assistance funding was a critical and effective strategy to prevent homelessness due to eviction and to house those without stable housing. The last of those dollars are soon to be spent out and, with pandemic eviction protections fully phased out, Oregon has seen a drastic increase in evictions and overwhelming requests for rent assistance from vulnerable tenant households. The Emergency Order OREDAP investment that sunsetted January 10, 2024 was a critical resource for our community to assist renters struggling to stay housed.

Oregon is 4th in the nation of people per capita experiencing homelessness, according to the most recent national study¹. Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes. According to the state economist, more than 50% of Oregon renters do not have enough money left over for food, medicine, and basic necessities. That means too many Oregon families are living on the edge and are one missed paycheck, high health care or car repair bill, or other setback away from losing their housing.

That plays out in Oregon eviction courtrooms every day, where more than 86% of all court evictions are due to a missed rent payment. The situation is more serious for Black Oregonians, who are 30% less likely to be homeowners and more likely to be renters due to the legacy of historic policies that blocked Black people from purchasing and owning property in our state.²

The considerable decrease in the availability of emergency rent assistance and eviction prevention support this fiscal year has led to a dramatic increase in court filings for eviction, with close to 2,000 eviction filings a month statewide currently. That number will likely continue to grow as the last of federal funding is fully depleted in FY24 and rent continues to increase faster than wages.

We must invest in proven strategies to protect housing stability and prevent homelessness while we work towards long-term solutions. Rental assistance and other eviction prevention support services keep people housed, keep families stable, keep children in the classroom, and prevent homelessness. SB 1530 is a smart investment today that will avoid higher human, financial, and societal costs later.

We strongly urge passage of SB 1530.

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¹<https://www.opb.org/article/2021/03/19/federal-analysis-shows-oregons-homeless-population-in-decline-prior-to-pandemic/>

² <https://www.koin.com/news/oregon/the-black-homeownership-gap-in-oregon/>