

Date: March 24th, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development

From: Roan Keller, Willamette University 2026

Dear Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development,

My name is Roan Keller and I am a current junior and Willamette University. I am writing today in strong support of Senate Bill 51, which directs the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS) to conduct a study on housing issues and submit findings to the Oregon Legislature by 2026. As a student and community member, I am particularly concerned about the housing inequities faced by Oregon's Latinx community, one of the fastest-growing populations in our state. **I know that SB 51 is an essential step toward addressing housing disparities that disproportionately impact Latinx Oregonians along with other marginalized communities.**

The Latinx population makes up **over 13% of Oregon's population**, yet Latinx Oregonians faces some of the most barriers to stable, affordable housing. According to a **2023 report by the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department**, Latinx households in Oregon experience rent-burden rates nearly **20% higher** than the state average (Oregon Housing and Community Services, 2023). Many Latinx families live in overcrowded housing situations or face the threat of displacement due to rising rents and gentrification, especially in urban areas like Portland and Salem. **SB 51 is crucial because it would create a statewide, data-driven foundation to better understand and address these housing challenges.**

This lack of stable housing has undeniable impacts on health and wellbeing. Latinx families are at greater risk of housing-related health issues, such as respiratory conditions from substandard housing or mental health strains associated with unstable living conditions. The **Oregon Health Authority's 2022 Health Equity Report** highlights how housing insecurity increases toxic stress and limits access to healthcare services (Oregon Health Authority, 2022). For Latinx youth, frequent moves and evictions lead to disruptions in schooling, contributing to educational achievement gaps compared to their non-Hispanic white peers. **Without a comprehensive housing study like what SB 51 calls for, policymakers will continue to overlook the direct link between housing and these broader negative affects on Latinx communities.**

Latinx workers are also vital to Oregon's labor force, particularly in agriculture, construction, hospitality, and service industries. However, Latinx workers face disproportionate wage gaps and job insecurity. **According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy (OCPP), Latinx households earn approximately 30% less on average compared to white households (Oregon Center for Public Policy, 2022).** This income disparity makes homeownership unachievable for many Latinx families, and it only furthers cycles of poverty. By directing OHCS to analyze housing issues statewide, SB 51 ensures that future legislation will be grounded in data that reflects the lived realities of Latinx families who are working and benefitting our community, and yet still struggling to afford basic housing.

Advocacy organizations such as **PCUN (Oregon's Farmworker Union)**, **Causa Oregon**, and the **Latino Network** have long worked to highlight these disparities and advocate for systemic reforms (PCUN, n.d.; Latino Network, n.d.). Latinx communities have been historically underrepresented in Oregon's policymaking process, and SB 51 provides an opportunity to center their needs by gathering detailed information on how housing policy affects them. The report SB 51 calls for could become a tool to strengthen future tenant protections, expand affordable housing programs, and ensure culturally specific resources are available to Latinx renters and homeowners.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these longstanding inequities. **According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Latinx renters in Oregon were among the groups hardest hit by pandemic-related job losses and housing instability, resulting in a surge of evictions and unsafe living conditions (National Low Income Housing Coalition, n.d.).** SB 51 is necessary as Oregon continues to recover and reimagine housing systems that benefit every single Oregonian.

In closing, I urge this committee to pass SB 51 without delay. Addressing the housing crisis in Oregon requires reliable, comprehensive data, and this bill lays the groundwork for actionable solutions that prioritize the voices and needs of Latinx communities and other marginalized groups. As Oregon works toward creating an equitable and inclusive future, we must ensure that no one is left behind, especially those who are so vital to our economy and community. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Roan Keller
Willamette University 2026

References

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