

Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue June 7, 2021

Chair Burdick, Vice Chair Boquist, and Senators Findley, Riley, and Wagner I wish to testify in favor of House Bill 2008. This bill defines parameters for and facilitates the construction of affordable housing on the property of religious organizations. It adds affordable housing to other uses already approved for tax exemption on such property.

Many religious organizations have a mission to serve the poor. Several churches work with other non-profit organizations to support temporary and transitional housing. Many of these churches would like to offer more permanent, stable housing to their unhoused neighbors. Some churches have land that is not being used to serve their members. As church membership declines, some churches are considering repurposing their buildings.

The tax exemption already in effect for the property of religious organizations simply extends, in this bill, to support the mission of the religious organization to provide affordable housing to low-income households. The bill clearly defines affordable housing to mean housing that is affordable to households with incomes equal to or less than 60 percent of the median family income for the county in which the organization is situated or for the state, whichever is greater. It stipulates that the housing is subject to an affordable housing covenant.

House Bill 2008 restricts conditions that local governments may place on the development of affordable housing provided by religious nonprofit corporations and expands zoning where such housing must be allowed.

I live in Clackamas County, where many people are rent burdened or extremely rent burdened with no hope for home ownership. There is a housing emergency in my area, with a lack of units and a dearth of affordable housing. I moved to Gladstone in 2009; I could not afford to buy a home in my working class, '70s built neighborhood today.

Land is expensive. Builders routinely claim that affordable housing does not "pencil out" because just the purchase of the land requires them to build larger, more expensive single-family homes to get the price they identify to make the profit they want. Religious organizations have land and a mission to help the poor. Removing barriers to allow the building of affordable housing on church property- and that of other religious organizations- is not an immediate "fix" for homelessness but it is an opportunity that will benefit our communities and will give people hope for the future.

I urge you to act promptly to move House Bill 2008 out of Committee with a "Do Pass" recommendation.

Thank you,
Ellen Burns
Gladstone