

Submitter: Jennifer Shuch
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB49

To the Senate Committee On Housing and Development:

My name is Jennifer Shuch, I am an urban planner and a housing advocate on the board of Portland: Neighbors Welcome. I am writing in support of SB 49 because it utilizes relatively minor changes to lower barriers to housing production.

When I started working for a multifamily brokerage in 2015, my first day was the day Portland declared a housing state of emergency. It is now 2025 and I have switched careers in large part due to a drive to help cities and states figure out how to address their housing shortages. Now, I work in communities across Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and other states, helping them find ways to increase their housing supply and promote economic development.

Right now, even as the state needs 360,000 new homes over the next decade, housing construction has largely come to a halt due to high interest rates, labor shortages, and rising material costs. These challenges are likely to get worse due to tariffs and crackdowns on immigration. While there is little Oregon can do to lower interest rates or development costs, the state does have the power to remove regulatory barriers that exacerbate these challenges

The solutions in SB 49 are recognized best practices. Advisory bodies should not have the power to reject projects that conform to a community's zoning code. Upzoning land, particularly in areas where dense development would meet environmental goals, should not be more challenging than downzoning. Oregon's urban growth boundary program has protected agricultural land and natural spaces for decades, accruing significant benefits to the state and its residents. We do not want cities expanding their urban growth boundaries because upzoning urban areas is too challenging or expensive.

Many of the communities I work in have conflicting regulations in their zoning code. Just this morning, I was researching the zoning of a small community in Washington where a zone that allowed multifamily housing had density capped at four units per acre. In some cases, this may just be an oversight. But if the state is serious about allowing a wider variety of housing types, it should make sure that these types of housing can actually be built.

The provisions in SB 49 are not costly or challenging to implement, but they will help to reduce barriers to creating the housing we need to stabilize households statewide.

Even if housing construction continues to be slow over the next couple of years, these changes will position communities statewide to benefit immediately from future changes in the market.

I urge you to vote for SB 49. It is a common sense package of reforms that will help pave the way for much-needed new housing statewide.