



February 7, 2024

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

Re: Support for SB 1537

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

I write on behalf of Home Forward in strong support of Senate Bill 1537. This bill provides a holistic set of tools to increase housing production with the scale and speed necessary to address our deficient of needed housing units and respond to future housing needs.

Home Forward is a Public Housing Authority (PHA) and the largest provider of affordable housing in the state of Oregon. We serve more than 15,500 Multnomah County low-income households through affordable housing units, rent assistance, and supportive services. We own and manage over 6,500 homes throughout Multnomah County and fund rent assistance for thousands of households residing in private unregulated housing that we do not directly oversee. Our mission is to create a better community by providing housing stability through affordable housing development, housing choice expansion, services that support quality of life, and advocacy to improve local and national housing systems.

We know that increased production of housing units, and especially affordable housing units, is one of the keys to addressing our housing and homelessness crisis. Data shows that rates of homelessness in any given area is directly linked to the affordability of housing. SB 1537 provides critical tools and resources for affordable housing developers to create more safe, stable, and affordable homes in our communities.

In addition to expressing our overall support, Home Forward would like to highlight our enthusiastic support for the bill's investments in housing production and land use adjustments. SB 1537's allocation of 40 million dollars in loans and grants for site acquisition for new low- and moderate-income housing development is a critical investment. Support for site acquisition allows developers such as Home Forward to get affordable housing units online at both a significantly lower costs than new development and at a greater speed than new development. As interest rates have increased at historical levels, this investment seizes on this unique moment in time where new housing projects are being made available to affordable housing developers with unprecedented frequency.

SB 1537's land use adjustment provisions would prevent major development setbacks that put affordable housing projects in financial jeopardy. Home Forward has firsthand experience navigating the existing land use variance process through our recent development in Troutdale. Over the course of two plus years, we engaged in a protracted community engagement and redesign process resulting from the initial denial of multiple design variances, parking reductions, and right of way adjustments intended to increase livability for our future residents and the overall number of units. Not only did this protracted process delay the availability of much needed affordable homes but it costs close to 2 million dollars in unanticipated development costs; an amount many affordable housing developers cannot sustain. Such setbacks

caused by denied variance requests and compliance with outdated and subjective land use regulations prevent us from reaching our housing production goals.

We ask this Committee to support SB 1537 and give affordable housing developers the tools and resources we need to build much needed housing units that respond to the needs of the community. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact Christina Dirks, Director of Policy and Planning at christina.dirks@homeforward.org or (503) 348-1196 regarding these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christina Dirks". It is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christina Dirks
Director of Policy and Planning
Home Forward