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February 23, 2022

Senate Committee on Rules
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 1537 -2

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Knopp, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed -2 amendments to SB 1537. As drafted, we have significant concerns with the -2 amendments and respectfully request changes if this bill is to move forward this session.

For 36 years, Central Oregon LandWatch (COLW) has been working to create well-planned cities and protect wild, open spaces across our region. As stated in our first comment, we support efforts to provide more affordable housing choices to Oregonians and to prevent displacement of historically disadvantaged communities. This is an issue that deeply impacts Central Oregon and communities across our state and that's why we actively support and participate in measures that can effectively and efficiently remove barriers to affordable housing. As written, Senate Bill 1537 -2, and the Task Force it proposes, fall short of effectively and efficiently addressing Oregon's affordable housing crisis. State resources can be better allocated through revised amendments to SB 1537, or via other approaches, to better focus on, understand, and address the myriad underlying causes converging to cause the affordable housing crisis in Oregon.

If SB 1537 -2 moves forward this session, we ask that adjustments and more clarity on the Task Force's composition and scope be made, as the current draft raises a number of questions: What will the final outcome be? Will it pertain to agencies and processes not named in the report? If so, why aren't others included in the task force? What community stakeholders were consulted in drafting the amendment? Communities and agencies affected by the Task Force's decisions deserve a seat at the table. The Task Force's composition should be inclusive - and the scope should be broadened and less prescriptive to more effectively accomplish its purpose of meaningfully tackling Oregon's affordable housing crisis. For example, as written, the current lack of clarity around key terms, definitions and roles has the potential to create an unintentionally burdensome process. And the narrow focus on a cost-analysis for one specific type of housing does not address the many underlying issues of affordable housing. As written, it also creates barriers to other, unrelated agency rulemaking for other important public benefits.



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LandWatch appreciates proactively and creatively crafting new approaches that address our affordable housing crisis and deliver more housing choices to Oregonians. This solution rests in an analysis much greater in scope than a housing impact statement, and should not unduly impede state agency rulemaking.

Given these issues, we are significantly concerned about SB 1537-2 and respectfully request it not move forward as drafted. If the committee chooses to move forward with this task force, we strongly urge you to amend the language as described here. This will help ensure that stakeholders and state agencies are better represented, will broaden the scope to provide a comprehensive approach to crafting more effective housing affordability solutions, and will better recognize the savings and public benefits of new rulemaking and regulations.

Sincerely,
Kristen Sabo
Central Oregon LandWatch