



BEYOND TOXICS

Leadership For a Clean and Just Oregon

February 10th, 2021

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Campos and Morgan, and Members of the House Housing Committee,

Beyond Toxics strongly supports HB 2842 to create a Healthy Homes program. As members of the Oregon Just Transition Alliance and part of the Oregon Clean Energy opportunity Campaign we support this policy as part of the 2021 legislative agenda and the ongoing work for environmental justice in Oregon.

Beyond Toxics is a statewide environmental justice organization advancing policies that ensure meaningful participation and cultivating grassroots leadership from Oregon's frontline and impacted communities. Established in 2001, we are a multicultural, inter-generational team dedicated to centering community leaders and building out the true diversity of our state's vibrant Environmental Justice movement.

Every Oregonian should have a healthy home to live in—especially as Oregon experiences increasingly dangerous wildfire seasons and navigates a respiratory pandemic.

Yet 54% of Oregonians live in housing built before 1978 that is energy-inefficient and in need of repairs, weatherproofing, and upgrades for disaster resiliency. Families with low-incomes, families living in rural and tribal communities, and individuals that identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or people of color are the most impacted due to decades of redlining and other discriminatory practices. Consequently, our communities are more likely to experience sick days and hospital visits caused by mold, cold weather, asthma flare-ups, and the inability to take refuge from bad outdoor air quality. All of this is exacerbated by, and more dangerous during, a respiratory pandemic.

Our office is based in Eugene, Oregon where we work with our community located in the 97402 zip code known as West Eugene. West Eugene is known as the “industrial corridor” where in 2019 more than ninety-six percent (96%) of all Eugene’s point source emissions are located. Many of these industrial facilities are located close to homes and schools in these neighborhoods, leading to ongoing, chronic exposure of the toxic chemicals. In 2019 when we conducted our Environmental Health Survey in 2019 many community members reported respiratory problems, cancer, and skin rashes.

West Eugene is a working class and low income neighborhood with older homes with poor insulation and window sealing, many of them concerned by the mold, and dirty air in their homes. Many residents do not open

their windows in the summer and keep their air conditioning on in order to cool down their homes when the air quality outside is bad increasing their energy consumption.

Residents of West Eugene who are already overburdened by health impacts are already energy burdened, having to pay for higher energy bills because of doctor visits, and running air purifiers throughout the year from the air pollution in the neighborhood. Many residents in West Eugene would benefit from the program that the Healthy Homes Bill creates by allowing them to access funds to retrofit their homes in the face of increasing wildfire smoke in the summers and the existing ongoing air pollution.

In 2017, Oregonians spent \$28 million on asthma-related hospital visits. Thirty-two percent of children live in energy burdened homes and asthma is the leading cause of missed school days.

Our housing quality problem is harming everyday people who are already hurting, and putting a burden on our healthcare system. This is exacerbated by—and more dangerous during—a respiratory pandemic.

HB 2842 creates a Healthy Homes program at the Oregon Healthy Authority to provide grants to eligible entities that provide financial assistance to persons in low income households to repair and rehabilitate their residences and to landlords to repair and rehabilitate dwelling units.

Creating and funding a Healthy Homes program creates more equity for our communities and makes good fiscal sense for our state. HB 2842 will: 1) help low-income families spend less money on heating and cooling; 2) create good local jobs in retrofitting and repairs; 3) provide a refuge from increasingly bad outdoor air quality; 4) reduce burden on hospitals and families by supporting better respiratory health; and 5) reduce the number of sick days for both adults and kids.

Please vote yes on HB 2842 to help build an Oregon where everyone lives in a home that is healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Ana Molina
Statewide Environmental Justice Program Manager
Beyond Toxics