



NORTHWEST
PILOT PROJECT

HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

March 1, 2023

Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for SB 603

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

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony, on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, in strong support of SB 603, including the -1 amendment. This bill establishes the People's Housing Assistance Fund Demonstration Program to examine the effectiveness of a guaranteed income program in improving the quality of life for Oregonians facing housing instability and homelessness.

Northwest Pilot Project (NWPP) is a social service agency with over five decades of experience in providing housing stabilization services to older adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Multnomah County. At NWPP, we understand the importance of offering person-centered solutions to homelessness that prioritize the needs of each individual household.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, only 5.3 million (1 in 4) eligible renter households receive federal rental assistance due to longstanding funding limitations, resulting in over 16 million low-income households at risk of eviction, homelessness, and other forms of housing instability.¹ SB 603-1 means a chance at housing stability that would otherwise be elusive for Oregonians that have qualified for, but do not currently receive, housing assistance through a housing voucher program or subsidized housing. Eligibility is restricted to households earning 60 percent or less of the Area Median Income.

By allowing participants to determine how best to utilize this supplementary income, SB 603-1 will play a critical role in homelessness prevention throughout the state. Participating households will receive monthly payments of \$1,000 over a 24-month period to be used at the discretion of the recipient, whether it be for rent, emergency expenses, food, child care, etc. With the ever-increasing

¹ Funding Limitations Create Widespread Unmet Need for Rental Assistance (2022), Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/funding-limitations-create-widespread-unmet-need-for-rental-assistance>

demand for federal rental assistance far exceeding the amount available, it is imperative that statewide long-term housing assistance programs such as the People's Housing Assistance Fund are implemented to address the widespread gap in homelessness prevention funding.

In 2018, NWPP collaborated with local and statewide partners to pilot the Long-term Rent Assistance (LRA) program, which began with 45 permanent rent vouchers that were both locally funded and locally controlled, and has grown to 72 vouchers. The vouchers are prioritized for households experiencing and at risk of homelessness who earn 30% or less of the Area Median Income. The LRA program became the model for the Regional Long-term Rent Assistance program in the Portland Metro area.

The LRA program was envisioned to address the lack of affordable units for the extremely low-income population we work with, who often rely on Social Security as their only source of income and typically spend 3-6 years on waitlists before accessing a subsidized unit. Two years after implementation of the LRA program, the Center for Outcomes Research and Education published an evaluation report² which confirmed what we had hoped: with permanent rent assistance, our participants thrived, reporting a 100% retention rate in stable housing while also demonstrating substantial improvements in mental and physical health as well as other aspects of well-being.

Prior to receiving an LRA voucher, participants had an average of three unmet basic needs, with the most reported needs being stable housing, clothing, transportation, and utilities.³ As soon as six months after program entry, participants began experiencing fewer unmet needs than before. One participant interviewed at this stage mentions that receiving housing support has “allowed me to pay for my basic needs, which, before this, my family and friends were kind of pitching in . . . now I can pay my own utilities, and groceries, and . . . go out to eat once in a while.”⁴ The incredible success of NWPP’s LRA pilot program demonstrates that investing in the long-term stability of vulnerable households is critical to homelessness prevention and reduction.

SB 603-1 is an innovative solution that directly supports vulnerable Oregonians that need and qualify for federal housing assistance, but are currently left on waiting lists, paying more than they can afford for market-rate homes, or in many cases living in shelters and on our streets. We urge you to support this bill, and share our appreciation for the work and leadership of Residents Organizing for Change in bringing this bill forward. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Golino de Lovato
Executive Director
Northwest Pilot Project

² Long Term Rent Assistance Program Evaluation Final Report (2019), Center for Outcomes Research and Education. https://www.nwpilotproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CORE_LRA-Final-Report.pdf

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Ibid.