



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

February 5, 2025

Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Chair Senator Khanh Pham, Vice-Chair Senator Dick Anderson

Re: Support for Senate Bill 444

Dear Chair Pham, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 444, which aims to create more accessible housing units throughout Oregon for older adults and other individuals living with disabilities.

Northwest Pilot Project (NWPP) is a social service agency with over five decades of experience in providing housing stabilization services to low and very low-income older adults, age 55 and over, experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Multnomah County. NWPP's extensive experience in service provision throughout Multnomah County has given us a strong vantage point to understand the urgent need for expanded production of deeply affordable housing units, both in the Portland Metro Area as well as statewide.

Older Adults and Disability Rates are Increasing Across Oregon: According to a recent report published by Portland State University's Population Research Center, "Oregon is expected to be older, made up of a larger non-White population, and living with a higher rate of disability than previously has been seen in the state."¹ Oregon must prepare for our aging population by addressing housing-related needs of older adults and people with disabilities such as the shortage of accessible housing.² Accessible housing is a racial equity issue in Oregon as the highest rates of disability at every age cohort (0-17, 18-64, 65+) are highest within Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race communities.³

¹ Portland State University (2023). *Oregon Tribal Land & County Population Projections by Race & Ethnicity*. Population Research Center, Portland State University. Retrieved from:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cT7_VqS8Bfay_BNrRJyOwd2ZJxIPo5wo/view

² Molinksy, Jennifer (2023). *Housing for America's Older Adults: Four problems we must address*. Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University. Retrieved from:
<https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/housing-americas-older-adults-four-problems-we-must-address>

³ U.S. Census Bureau (2020). American Community Survey, 5-Year data, tables B18101a-i.

Housing precarity/homelessness for older adults: Older adults are the fastest growing segment of our homeless population.⁴ A significant proportion of Oregon's older adult population rely on social security benefits (e.g., Social Security Insurance, or SSI) to afford rent; a gap is growing between SSI and units available at fair market rent.⁵ The availability of accessible units is also related to homelessness; in a California-based research study on older adults experiencing homelessness (Oregon's best comparable study), 32% of survey respondents reported that they were not able to find housing that met their needs due to a physical disability and housing characteristics such as the presence of stairs, doors that don't accommodate the width of a wheelchair, lack of handrails in showers, etc.⁶

Lack of accessible housing data and need to overproduce accessible housing:

Housing Needs Analyses and Production Strategies at the state and local levels do not have data needed to estimate the available accessible housing stock, which hampers our ability to develop adequate production strategies. This lack of data should not limit policy that leads to the production of much-needed accessible housing, which works for everyone; inaccessible housing is discriminatory and does not affirmatively further fair housing.

Summary: SB 444 addresses the need to increase accessible housing production by increasing the quality and quantity of accessible housing in Oregon. This bill addresses the demographic imperative of population aging, racial equity (since Black, Indigenous and mixed race communities are most impacted by disabilities), and addressing housing precarity upstream by producing appropriate housing for older adults and people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 444, which has the potential to drastically improve our state's ability to serve older adults and those living with a disability. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at yonik@nwpilotproject.org and/or aland@nwpilotproject.org.

Sincerely,

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Northwest Pilot Project

Alan DeLaTorre
Policy Advocate
Northwest Pilot Project

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023). *Addressing Homelessness Among Older Adults: Final Report*. Retrieved from: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/9ac2d2a7e8c360b4e75932b96f59a20b/addressing-older-adult-homelessness.pdf>

⁵ Social Security Insurance (SSI) data: U.S. Social Security Administration; Fair Market Rents data: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

⁶ University of California San Francisco (2024). Toward Dignity: Understanding Older Adult Homelessness: Findings from the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness. Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative. Retrieved from: <https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/resources/reports/toward-dignity-understanding-older-adult-homelessness>