



# Oregon Law Center

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**To: House Committee on Housing**  
**From: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center**  
**Date: January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021**  
**Re: HB 2703**

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Campos and Morgan, and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this written testimony in support of House Bill 2101 with pending amendments. This bill addresses two important topics designed to improve existing rental assistance programs so that they work better for low-income tenants, and their landlords.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Helping families maintain safe, stable housing is a critical part of our work. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy. Across the state, in urban and rural areas, access to safe, stable, and affordable housing has become one of the most important issues facing our clients. This was true even before the pandemic, but COVID has further highlighted the critical need for housing stability as a public health factor that saves lives.

HB 2101 makes minor but helpful changes to two important programs that are beneficial to low-income tenants:

1) **Housing Choice Landlord Guarantee Program:** The Landlord Guarantee program was created in 2013, when Oregon's Source of Income anti-discrimination statutes were expanded to include protection for participants in the Housing Choice voucher program. The Guarantee program provides re-imbursement of up to \$5,000 to landlords if they incur damages or have unpaid rent when renting to a Section 8 voucher recipient. At the program's creation, a statutory advisory committee was created to collaborate with OHCS in administering the program. Myself and my colleague, John VanLandingham, are tenant representatives on the Housing Choice Advisory Committee (HCAC). The committee also includes landlord representatives, public housing authority representatives, and representatives of OHCS.

a. **Section 2** of the bill amends the Guarantee Program to allow landlords to apply for reimbursement by submitting to the Housing and Community Services Department an application with documentation, instead of requiring a court judgment. This change is helpful to landlords as well as tenants – landlords will no longer have to pay to seek a court judgment, and tenants will no longer risk default judgments obtained without documentation, along with the accompanying court record with additional adverse

- consequences. The HCAC developed this concept in a collaborative fashion designed to work for all sides. **We support the changes in Section 2 of the bill.**
- b. **Section 3** of the bill addresses data reporting requirements. This section was not discussed by the HCAC. We understand there is an agreement to submit an amendment to remove Section 3 of the bill. **We support removing Section 3 of the bill via amendment.**
- 2) **Rent Guarantee Program:** The rent guarantee program assists tenants and landlords outside the voucher program. Only 25% of tenants who are eligible for Section 8 housing vouchers are lucky enough to get off the wait list to receive voucher assistance. So, most landlords and tenants are not eligible for the Section 8 Housing Choice Landlord Guarantee Program. The broader rent guarantee programs are meant to provide incentives and financial assistance to landlords who rent to low-income tenants who complete tenant readiness education courses. The education courses greatly aid tenants in understanding their rights and protections, as well as their obligations. After completion of the courses, the rent guarantee program backs graduates, by ensuring payments to landlords for unpaid rent and for eviction and property damage costs. Section 4 of the bill with the Dash 1 amendment will provide greater flexibility to the Rent Guarantee Program, to allow payments of up to \$5,000 per landlord application. **We support Section 4 of the bill with the Dash 1 amendment.**

In closing, we re-iterate the importance of housing stability and protections for low-income tenants in communities across Oregon. This bill with amendments is one of many steps necessary to ensure greater housing stability for all communities.

Thank you for your work and for your commitment to Oregonians,

Sincerely,  
Sybil Hebb