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

Through eight direct service programs and a membership of 15 denominations and over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL) serve hundreds of thousands of Oregonians all across the state. As a nonprofit organization that primarily serves low-income and environmental justice communities, EMO/OIPL wishes to state our support for HB 2842, the Healthy Homes bill. This bill supports home improvements for low-income and environmental justice communities that will improve health, lower energy bills, and create jobs.

Scripture tells us that the home is an essential foundation for building virtuous societies: “My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest” (Isaiah 32:18). Last year, many Oregonian families experienced home as both a refuge and a liability. Of course, countless low-income families were already suffering before 2020 because of inefficient and wildfire-vulnerable homes. But between the Covid-19 lockdowns that increased the need for secure housing, and the historically intense wildfires that polluted and destroyed Oregonians’ homes, our state saw more clearly than ever that many of our neighbors’ homes are not “peaceful dwelling places,” but rather sources of financial stress and health risk, especially for people with disabilities, low-income communities, and BIPOC communities. How can a community expect to thrive when community members’ right to safe, affordable housing is being neglected?

These challenges present an opportunity to ensure that home repairs and retrofits are affordable for those who most need them. HB 2842 directs funding for such repairs to the organizations that best know their communities’ needs. By funding both energy efficiency improvements and health-improving installations, the Healthy Homes Program will lower energy bills, reduce emergency room visits, and save lives. And, as the program develops, the Healthy Homes Task Force will ensure that the agencies coordinating this effort continue to learn from the organizations and community members directly affected by the program.

Lastly, EMO/OIPL supports the important changes made in the -3 amendment to HB 2842, which expands support to residents in multifamily buildings and makes the reporting process easier for grant recipients.

We hope and pray your legislative deliberations maintain focus on caring for all Oregonians, especially people with disabilities, low-income communities and environmental justice communities, and we pray for

your health and safety in this time of pandemic. Know that your gatherings are covered in our prayers as you represent us and make decisions that shape our collective future.

Sincerely yours,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon/Oregon Interfaith Power & Light,
Creation Justice Programs

