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April 19, 2021

Sen. Kayse Jama and Committee Members
Senate Committee on Housing & Development
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB 2583 (Occupancy Limits on Housing)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2583. 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

1000 Friends supports HB 2583. This bill would prohibit governments from imposing occupancy limits on the number of people who can live in a single dwelling unit. We understand the -1 amendments are intended to clarify that local governments retain the ability to limit the number of persons based on fire, building, and other health and safety codes.

Current occupancy limits in Oregon cities typically prohibit more than a specified number of people from sharing a dwelling, unless they are related.¹ These occupancy limits are not related to health, safety, or any other legitimate rationale. This is illustrated by the fact that the vast majority of occupancy limits are imposed regardless of the square footage of the dwelling, and are based merely on familial relationship - for example, while 10 related people could live in one house, in many cities 6 unrelated people could not live in that same house.² And some cities even exempt from the occupancy limit “live-in servants.”

Rather, these occupancy limits, and their lack of any rational basis, reflect outdated and often racist notions of “family” and desires to exclude certain groups of people, such as immigrants, renters, those of lower income, and students. Today, we see many different types of “households,” which can include blended families, unmarried couples and friends, renters, and more.

These occupancy limits are not only discriminatory, they cut off a potential source of much-needed additional and more affordable housing in cities and towns across Oregon. The legal ability to share a house or rent a room often offers the most affordable and sustainable housing option, of a bedroom in an existing home. Eliminating residential occupancy limits is a much-needed and overdue action.

¹ Usually defined as “blood, marriage, legal adoption, or guardianship.”

² See, e.g., Sightline, *Legalizing Inexpensive Housing*, <https://www.sightline.org/series/legalizing-inexpensive-housing/>

Thank you for consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Mary Kyle McCurdy

Mary Kyle McCurdy
Deputy Director