

February 5, 2025

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

RE: Support for Senate Bill 444 – Expanding Housing Accessibility in Oregon

Dear Chair Pham, Vice Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of AGE+, I am writing in **support of SB 444**, a critical piece of legislation that will **expand housing accessibility** for older Oregonians and individuals with disabilities. As a statewide nonprofit committed to ensuring that all Oregonians can **age and thrive in their communities**, AGE+ recognizes that **accessible, affordable housing** is a fundamental component of aging with dignity.

Among our programs, services and policy efforts, we are also an affordable housing developer. We have proactively built 100% of our units with accessible features such as no step entry, wide floor space for wheelchairs, fully accessible bathrooms, wide hallways and doorways along with accessible community spaces. **This was not cost-prohibitive** as it was incorporated into the design from the beginning.

Oregon is **experiencing a demographic shift**, with a rapidly growing population of **older adults and people with disabilities**. Yet, the **supply of accessible housing remains woefully inadequate**. Currently, only **2% of housing units in large developments** are required to be accessible, while **15% of Oregonians** have disabilities. This disparity leaves too many older adults and individuals with mobility challenges **unable to find suitable housing**, pushing many into **homelessness or institutional care**.

Older adults are **the fastest-growing segment of Oregon's homeless population**. Studies have shown that **lack of accessible housing contributes to homelessness**, as many older adults are forced into unsafe, unaffordable, or inaccessible housing that **fails to meet their mobility needs**.

SB 444 prevents this downward spiral by ensuring that **more housing is built to accommodate aging and disabilities from the outset**.

SB 444 is not just about housing—it is about **equity**. The highest rates of disability in Oregon exist among **Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race communities**, making accessible housing a **racial justice issue**. Furthermore, ensuring a **steady supply of accessible units** will reduce tenant turnover, **lower long-term costs for property managers**, and **increase housing stability for low-income renters**.

By **endorsing SB 444**, AGE+ stands with Oregon's older adults, people with disabilities, and historically marginalized communities in calling for a **housing system that works for all**. We urge the legislature to **pass SB 444** to ensure that our state is prepared for the **growing demand for accessible housing** and to create a future where **all Oregonians can age in place with dignity**.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at shooper@ageplus.org.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hooper
President & CEO
AGE+