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To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development
From: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center
Date: February 13th, 2024
Re: Support for SB 1530 Rent Assistance Investments

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 1530, and investments in critical rent assistance funding to prevent homelessness in communities across the state.

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. The majority of our client community is rent burdened – one emergency away from homelessness – or are houseless themselves, living either doubled-up or in shelter, or living outside without adequate shelter.

Homelessness and housing instability are the most devastating issues facing our client communities across the state. As we work towards long-term solutions by increasing housing supply, we must also take swift and decisive action to prevent more homelessness. It is ten times less expensive to invest in prevention services than it is to intervene and attempt rehousing services. A priority for OLC is that resources are adequately allocated to prevention strategies that are available to communities most impacted by the housing crisis, especially communities that have been systemically and historically excluded from assistance. To that end, we respectfully urge your support of investments in housing stability services as outlined below:

- \$45 million in rent assistance through community action agencies and community-based organizations.
- \$6.5 million to the Urban League of Oregon for culturally specific housing stability services.
- \$6 million to the Home Fund at Oregon Worker Relief for housing stability services for immigrant Oregonians.
- \$2 million for outreach services for residents of expiring affordable housing units.

Oregon is among the states with the most cost-burdened renters in the nation.¹ As a result, Oregon has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the nation. There are close to 2,000 evictions for inability to pay rent per month, every month, across the state. When rent assistance is available as a resource to tenants facing eviction, cases can be positively resolved. But at current levels of need, the funds previously allocated will be gone by July 2024.

Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes. According to the state economist, more than 50% of Oregon renters do not have enough money left over for food, medicine, and basic necessities. The situation is

¹ [OR housing: Oregon among states with the most cost-burdened renters: Harvard \(koin.com\)](https://www.koin.com/article/oregon-housing-cost-burdened-renters)



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more serious for Black and Brown Oregonians, who are 30% less likely to be homeowners and more likely to be renters due to the legacy of systemic racism that blocked people from purchasing and owning property in our state. Investments in culturally responsive housing stability programs, such as the culturally specific programs offered by Urban League and the Home Fund at Oregon Worker Relief, are required in order to ensure access to our most impacted communities.

With a sharp spike in high-rent homelessness across the state, while we work towards long-term supply solutions, it's urgent that we continue proven prevention strategies. Rent assistance is a smart investment today that will avoid higher human, financial, and societal cost tomorrow. Investments in these programs will help ensure that landlords get paid, evictions are avoided, and most importantly, Oregonians stay housed.

Thank you for your work on behalf of Oregonians.