

House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
HB 2001 Testimony

I'm grateful this committee is addressing the need for adequate housing, in terms of its quality, quantity and availability. I'm going to start with the radical proposition that persons with disabilities have rights equal to those who are non-disabled. If we agree that all people are created equal, and have lives of equal value, then the following must also be true. Persons with disabilities need to be actively engaged in these discussions, along with other historically marginalized populations: BIPOC, im/migrants, women, LGBTQ, persons who are non-binary, and others about policies that affect us. In other words, please understand how your decisions will affect these diverse populations. For persons with disabilities, including persons of color with disabilities and other marginalized communities, the likely outcomes for this bill / law, will not have the outcome you intend, that is choice with respect to affordable, accessible, and adequate housing.

With that as preface, let's start with the facts. We know persons with disabilities disproportionately are in inadequate housing and disproportionately are unhoused. We know that persons with disabilities are disproportionately among the poorest of the poor, and have higher medical and transportation costs than our non-disabled peers. This is especially true for persons with disabilities who also belong to the above-mentioned other historically marginalized groups (LGBTQ, BIPOC, etc.). Data on this is irrefutable.

The bill before us aims to reduce inequities in housing for all Oregonians. I've submitted written and oral testimony already twice – for the hearings on 7 Feb and 16 Feb – during which I have argued broadly that the current bill will not achieve your intended outcome, housing equity. It won't do that because unless changes are made, persons with disabilities of all races, will be further left behind. In other words, for our communities, this bill will maintain or even further housing disparities. In addition to those broad points, others and I have also pointed out text in previous drafts and in the current draft that should be amended. I made specific line-edits that should be incorporated concerning: 1) adding definitions of key terms such as "accessibility" and "accessible housing"; 2) requiring the collection of data that can be disaggregated by disability impairment type; 3) setting in place measures to incentivize the production of accessible housing; and 4) mandating jurisdictions to report on progress towards the production of accessible housing. These changes are needed for this bill to achieve your laudable goal.

I want to conclude this testimony with two points: first, persons with disabilities and their families are not a small segment of the population. OHSU estimates that 25% of Oregonians have a disability. Per the 2019 American Housing Survey almost 2 in 10 households include a person with accessibility needs. Over the next twenty years this will increase in raw numbers and as a percent of the overall population. I note that disability prevalence tends to be higher amongst older persons, BIPOC populations, families in lower socio-economic conditions, renters, and persons who are unhoused. Harvard's Joint Center on Housing Studies notes that over the next 20 years households with persons in their 80s will be the fastest growing age group, and that more than half of those households already currently report difficulties either with navigating to/in their homes, or using particular features (bathrooms, kitchens, etc).

Second, accessibility is a precondition for equity in all aspects – housing, education, health care, etc. If a building or service is not accessible, then persons with disabilities and older persons (whether or not they self-identify) will experience discrimination.

Our understanding of housing equity must include accessibility as an integral element. This bill, which aims at housing equity for all Oregonians, needs to define, enshrine as a right, and promote the construction of accessible housing.

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