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- NeighborWorks
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May 4, 2021

Representative Julie Fahey, Chair
Representative WInsvey Campos, Vice-Chair
Representative Lily Morgan, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Housing
900 Court Street NE, Room 453
Salem, OR 97301

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

Housing Oregon urges the House Committee on Housing to support SB 291A, an important step towards eliminating a significant barrier to housing options for people with criminal histories who are trying to rebuild their lives.

We thank the Governor's Racial Justice Council for their leadership advocating for this change. This burden disproportionately falls most heavily on Black and brown communities because of the systemic racism in our criminal justice system. Using criminal history to predict whether someone will be a successful tenant will likely have a racially discriminatory impact.

SB291A will ensure landlords can no longer discard an individual's application to rent automatically upon learning of a previous arrest or conviction, without considering the circumstances. The bill will require landlords to assess individuals and block consideration of arrest records in cases where the individual was never charged as well as convictions for actions that are no longer illegal under Oregon law.

As nonprofit affordable housing providers, we are committed to making housing affordable and accessible to those who need it the most. Especially in times like these with a housing and homelessness crisis pushing our neighbors out of their homes

and communities and making poverty that much harder to manage and overcome. We know that our elected officials across Oregon are also deeply committed to addressing the housing needs in our communities.

Many of our member organizations in the Portland metro area were actively involved several years ago when the City of Portland developed new tenant screening rules including eliminating discrimination against those with criminal histories. While some organizations raised concerns about implementation, including additional cost and safety for their resident communities, ultimately, we endorsed the changes recognizing it was the right thing to do.

Tenant screening reforms, such as SB 291A, are an attempt to make it possible for people to access more housing in the wider market as well as among us nonprofit providers. Our communities are safer and healthier when all our neighbors are housed, including community members who have had involvement with the criminal justice system or past struggles with housing stability.

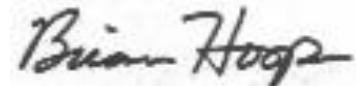
People with criminal records are at a disproportionate risk of homelessness, and subsequent recidivism, due to barriers in securing housing. Such barriers increase the risk of housing instability, homelessness, and subsequent recidivism. Stable housing can help disrupt the cycles of incarceration. Housing after incarceration can support people to stabilize and get back on their feet, maintain employment, and reconnect with their families and communities.

We are ready to work with Oregon Housing and Community Services on implementation of administrative rules. Early and active engagement of all key stakeholders will produce more sound public policy. It will be necessary to effectively communicate and train owners and property managers on such new policy.

Housing Oregon is a membership-based statewide association of affordable housing Community Development Corporations (CDCs) committed to serving and supporting low-income Oregonians across the housing needs spectrum – from homeless to homeowner. We are working towards a day when every Oregonian has a safe and healthy place to call home.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions at 503-475-6056 or brian@housingoregon.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Hoop". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Brian" on top and "Hoop" below it, slightly overlapping.

Brian Hoop
Executive Director
Housing Oregon