



SB 101 First-Time Home Buyer Savings Accounts

House Revenue Committee – Jody Wiser – 5.6.2025

My name is Jody Wiser and I am representing Tax Fairness Oregon, a network of volunteers who advocate a rational and equitable tax code.

Tax Fairness Oregon supports the extension of this savings program. It serves a worthwhile purpose, enabling first time home buyers a better chance at purchasing property and building their personal wealth. There is also plenty of evidence that home owners are more involved in the civic life of their community and this state. We support that.

Our concern remains, as we testified last year, that few Oregonians know of this program. John Calhoun's daughter bought her first house less than two years ago and John, who follows tax policies and programs closely, was unaware of the program. In the most recent data from 2022 only 1,250 tax filers showed that they took advantage of this program in a state where roughly 40,000 students graduate from high school every year. While the forecast in DOR's Tax Expenditure Report is for the program to grow in the next Biennium due to the changes made by this committee last year, we still believe that most Oregonians that could benefit by this program are not, and will not, be made aware of it.

John Googled “first time home buyer” and got a lot of mortgage sales pitches and even State of Oregon grant programs, but there was nothing that popped up about this program unless I added the word “savings” which would only be done by someone already aware of the program.

We would be glad to discuss ideas about promotion off-line, but we hope the state will make more of an effort to let our citizens know about the existence of this program. For example, were the program on the State Treasurer’s Website alongside College Savings Plans, it would get better airtime. Attached to my testimony are a set of ideas John developed.

The biggest issue with the first-time home buyers savings plan is that no one knows about it. Here are low-cost suggestions to publicize it.

- The Treasury has done a great job of publicizing Oregon College savings and retirement savings programs. The former Treasurer would mention them in almost every public speech he made. The web site <https://www.oregon.gov/treasury/financial-empowerment/Pages/default.aspx> is a well-done site with great graphics, strong selling points and easy access to enrollment. It does not mention the First-Time Home buyer savings program. When I asked both the former and current Treasurer why not I was told that it was because the Home Buyer savings program is run by DOR, not Treasury.
- The DOR web site for the First-time Home Buyer Savings Accounts <https://www.oregon.gov/dor/programs/individuals/pages/first-time-home-buyer.aspx> is drab and mechanical. It is not a marketing effort. Clearly this program, even though it is administered by DOR should be part of the Treasury's Financial empowerment effort and web page with the same glossy marketing effort. We should also ask why this one savings program is run by DOR and not Treasury?
- Where ever the website is located, the site should be optimized for searching on Google.
- If they do not already have it, every tax reporting software company should be contacted to ensure that their programs for Oregon include asking non-home owners if they have a homebuyer savings account for tax credit purposes.
- Every tax accountant in Oregon should receive a marketing brochure annually so that they ask their clients if a savings account is appropriate for them.
- Continue to work with credit unions and banks to encourage savings accounts.

If you really want to encourage this program, start with a conversation with your former fellow senator and current Treasurer to discuss the above suggestions. If she is receptive, then this could all be done administratively.

If moving the program to Treasury is part of the answer and requires legislation then now is the time to do it as an amendment to SB 101. The purpose of having a review of tax credits periodically is to ensure that they are serving their original goals and if not whether they should be eliminated or modified. In this case I believe this program should be modified and improved in this session.