



Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Housing & Development
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

February 9, 2024

RE: Opposing the Urban Growth Boundary Expansion in SB 1537, Governor Tina Kotek's housing and land use bill.

Dear Chair Jama, Vice Chair Anderson, and Members of the Senate Committee on Housing & Development,

On behalf of the more than 74,000 members and supporters of the Sierra Club Oregon Chapter, we are writing in firm opposition to the one-time tool for cities to expand their Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs) in Senate Bill 1537.

We deeply appreciate both the unique housing and homelessness crisis facing the state of Oregon as well as Governor Kotek's efforts to respond to the emergency with the urgency it demands. Environmental justice cannot be realized in our state until every single Oregonian can afford a safe place to call home.

Senate Bill 1537 has a lot of good in it. Our members are especially glad to see a big investment of infrastructure dollars needed to fix the neighborhood facilities needed in order to add housing to places where it currently cannot be built. Unfortunately the one-time expansion of Oregon's urban growth boundaries in SB 1537 runs counter to our shared goal of stopping the urgent crisis of housing and homelessness. If allowed to continue, sprawling new subdivisions on the outskirts of metro areas threaten to use up the precious infrastructure dollars needed to complete neighborhoods that are inside of existing urban growth boundaries.

Building at the very outer edge of metro areas means putting people in areas that are more likely to burn in a wildfire, areas where people are forced to drive long distances by car, and areas with trees and green space that are currently sequestering carbon and protecting clean air and water. We need to be realistic about the tradeoffs of this bill.

Expanding the urban growth boundary threatens to increase our carbon emissions substantially, make it harder to protect communities from major wildfires, and paves over natural spaces for new subdivisions in locations that are not desirable for people of any income level. The \$20 million for climate investments in housing in SB 1537 does not offset these harms. We cannot meet our climate goals with actions that increase emissions and make wildfire resilience efforts harder.

We ought to be laser-focused on solving homelessness, not on subsidizing development for middle and high income earners. Faraway subdivisions at the outskirts of metro areas are not a good place for people wanting transitional or affordable housing. People who have experienced homelessness are more likely to stay housed if they can easily access mental health and addiction services, healthcare, public transit, and friends and community. When people move to Oregon's cities from out of state, they are largely not interested in living on the farthest edges of town. Similarly, people experiencing poverty will not be set up for success living far removed from community connections and vital recovery services.

The 30% affordability requirement for new housing outside of the current UGBs does not inspire confidence. Portlanders watched as [the Ritz Carlton opted to pay a \\$7 million fee to the City of Portland in order to avoid their affordable housing requirement](#) for a major new tower development downtown. Additionally, the definition of what qualifies as affordable housing can still be too expensive for those who are most desperate for stable housing. Expanding the urban growth boundary might help Governor Kotek hit her numerical goal for new units of housing, but it will not bring the kind of housing we need to end the housing and homelessness crisis.

SB 1537 will likely not see any environmental or conservation support unless it is amended to remove the one-time urban growth boundary expansion. There is already a process by which cities can prove a need for limited expansions of their urban growth expansion. There is no reason to give a deal to developers so that they can maximize their profits on faraway subdivisions. Our public officials should be doing everything possible to increase incentives for new housing in areas where people want and need to live.

Respectfully submitted,



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