

March 2, 2025

Testimony on HB 2138 Middle Housing Bill to the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness

I am opposed to HB 2138. This bill deregulates new construction with the stated purpose of solving our housing crisis. However, if we intend to increase affordable housing, we cannot deny the fact that the truly affordable houses are those that already exist and that the supply can be increased through adapting them. New construction cannot provide housing at the income level we desperately need. The effect of passing this bill will, in fact, do the opposite of what it claims to solve. It adds to the housing crisis by making homes unaffordable.

New construction has its place, but not where it displaces neighbors and eliminates hope for the intergenerational wealth that lifts people out of poverty.

HB 2138 makes it easier for developers to replace existing homes with new construction. In effect, and without any say in the matter, the citizens subsidize the developers' profits by giving up their ability to afford their homes, by giving up their neighborhoods, by giving up the history that creates the community stability that comes from a sense of longevity, a sense of belonging.

The tired and unbased argument that new construction of middle housing is necessary because those who object to it do so because they do not want to share their homes and neighborhoods, is dishonest and hypocritical. Citizens are saying they do not want any neighborhoods destroyed; that there is a better way. What new construction has done to our underrepresented communities is itself, yet again, another assault by white privilege. If the State is committed to solving the housing crisis, instead of laws that subsidize developers by making it easy for them to replace existing housing, we should be passing laws that promote and make it easier for people to share their homes with multiplex conversions, house sharing, room rentals, ADUs, and other ways that can, not only create truly affordable housing, but also allow people to stay in their homes and communities.

In particular, Section 22(1)(f), while doing nothing to provide for affordable housing or even middle housing, just allows developers to decide their impact on the communities, destroying their history without citizen involvement, or consideration of our state as a whole, flaunting Oregon's Land Use Goal 1. How can someone who knows little to nothing about the history and identity of a neighborhood have the only say?

In today's political climate, we must work to uphold the laws that protect the citizens from those who seek profit by falsely claiming their intent is public good. Neither the governor nor the legislature can claim that they serve the people of Oregon if they use the housing crisis as a profit-making opportunity; ignore Oregon's Land Use Goal 5 for historic resources; and ignore Oregon's purported commitment to climate goals. The greenest, most affordable, and most equitable homes are the ones that already exist, the ones with history.

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