



MULTIFAMILY NW

The Association Promoting Quality Rental Housing

March 14, 2023

Oregon House Committee on Housing & Homelessness
900 Court. St NE
Salem, OR 97301

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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RE: Concerns with HB 2680

Chair Dexter, members of the committee,

Multifamily NW is the largest association of housing providers in the state, with more than 1,000 members collectively managing more than 275,000 units throughout Oregon and southwest Washington. Our association advocates for common sense public policy with one goal in mind: Keeping Oregonians housed.

We believe that to do that, this Legislature must focus on providing permanent rent assistance to low-income Oregonians, ensuring that housing supply is aligned with our growing population, and creating a regulatory environment where housing providers can do what they do best – provide housing.

HB 2680 unfortunately would make it more difficult for housing providers to get renters in units in an efficient manner. The application screening process is already governed by federal fair housing law and by Chapter 90 in the state of Oregon – placing new and unnecessary mandates on the housing provider will disrupt the efficient and fair process by which housing providers are already compliant with.

Applicants frequently work with the housing provider to check on the status of their application. Mandating a confirmation of screening with a receipt to the applicant is impractical for housing providers that process hundreds of thousands of applications on a regular basis. A receipt with a dollar amount could also lead to broad confusion about what a screening entails, likely not accounting for staff time and other costs that are associated with this process.

This bill has broader consequences that we encourage the committee to consider. For a wide array of legal reasons, many housing providers opt to contract with a third-party screening company that would, by association, also theoretically be tasked with complying with any new regulations.

Multifamily NW supports specifying Gender Identity as a protected class of unlawful discrimination, as it is a protection already granted by Oregon statutes and the Fair Housing Act. In that same vein, we are concerned with relegating duplicative authority to the Bureau of Labor and Industries for enforcement of these new provisions. Violations of fair housing law are the purview of the federal government, but this bill would vest that responsibility with an understaffed state agency that could distract from other priorities.

Our association has additional concerns about the aggressive 14-day timeframe specified to return screening fees if the applicant withdraws the application in writing. If this legislation moves forward, we request that a clearer definition of “in writing” be further developed, as emails, texts, application portal platform messages, and even mailed letters could potentially qualify. Additionally, by exponentially increasing the penalty for noncompliance by hundreds of dollars per application, this bill places an undue burden on housing providers that runs counter to the goal of keeping Oregonians housed.

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Multifamily NW appreciates the chance to share these concerns about HB 2680 and looks forward to working with the committee to develop and pass policies that will stabilize the rental housing industry throughout the state.

Thank you,

Gary Fisher
Deputy Executive Director
Multifamily NW