



February 10, 2021

The Housing and Development Committee
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Submitted Electronically Re: The Fair Housing Council of Oregon's Support of SB 291

Dear Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the Housing and Development Committee,

The Fair Housing Council of Oregon (FHCO) supports Senate Bill 291 which will increase housing access for protected class individuals impacted by the criminal system.

FHCO is a statewide civil rights organization whose mission is to eliminate housing discrimination through access to enforcement and education. Our agency is committed to addressing the racial inequities in the criminal justice system that correlate to inequities in access to housing. In 2016, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released guidance related to the use of criminal history in screening criteria, stating that, “[b]ecause of widespread racial and ethnic disparities in the U.S. criminal justice system, criminal history-based restrictions on access to housing are likely disproportionately to burden African Americans and Hispanics.”¹ Additionally, the HUD guidance notes that individuals with disabilities also are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. The 2016 HUD guidance provides that tenants impacted by the criminal justice system should be screened and should have their circumstances assessed individually.

There is vital need in the state of Oregon to ensure that people of color and individuals with disabilities who have been disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system maintain fair access to housing. SB 291 guarantees that diverted convictions and convictions for things that are no longer a crime cannot be used against applicants, and it also ensures that applicants with a criminal history receive an individualized and fair assessment of their application.

We urge the Housing and Development Committee to support and pass SB 291 as it creates important protections for protected class individuals in their equal access to housing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allan Lazo".
Allan Lazo, Executive Director

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *Office of General Counsel Guidance on Application of Fair Housing Act Standards to the Use of Criminal Records by Providers of Housing and Real Estate-Related Transactions*. April 4, 2016, available at: https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/HUD_OGCGUIDAPPFHASTANDCR.PDF