



**Mark Meek
State Senator
District 20**

February 14, 2024

TO: Senate Committee on Human Services

SUBJECT: Support for SB 1591

Chair Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 1591, a piece of legislation very close to my heart. This bill will help more Oregon seniors access the housing and care that they need and deserve.

Oregon's independent adult care homes (also commonly referred to as "adult foster homes") are small, residential-family type homes located in established neighborhoods. For nursing home residents and their families who want the experience of a non-institutional family home – but who require medical care typically provided at institutional facilities – adult care homes are a welcome option.

Adult care homes represent a critical part of our state's overall care system, offering a more personalized and nurturing environment than larger, corporate institutions – which are quickly becoming the only options left available for Oregon seniors. Patients in adult care homes are given a level of individual attention, care, humanity, and familiarity that isn't found in those other care settings. They also have lower incidences of falls, abuse, and other problems.

But Oregon's adult care homes are facing a crisis.

That's because the alarming rate at which adult care homes are closing in Oregon – against the backdrop of a fast-growing senior population – is making them more inaccessible than ever. In fact, since 2007 we've seen more than 50% of adult care homes close in Oregon, a trend that threatens the well-being of all Oregon seniors who need care.

Seniors in Oregon need housing. SB 1591 will provide more options for affordable housing and high-quality care.

SB 1591 will allow Oregon's adult care home providers the opportunity to increase their home's capacity to six or seven residents – but only if certain, higher standards are met. These standards include:

- The provider received the home's initial license at least 24 months prior to application;
- The home has been licensed for five residents for at least 12 months prior to application;
- The home has completed two full inspections without any enforcement actions;
- The provider attests that an increase will not adversely affect the health, safety, or quality of life of the home's current residents;
- The home is in compliance with all DHS and APD rules regarding emergency evacuation;
- The provider has filed a new evacuation plan to address how the provider will evacuate the increased number of residents;
- The home has a residential sprinkler system in place and is in compliance with all fire and safety regulations adopted by the department by rule (including rules adopted as part of this bill); and
- The provider has paid any required fees.

Under SB 1591, qualifying for a sixth or seventh resident is only available to providers who meet this highest standard of care. Residents who will be able to access these homes under SB 1591 can be assured that their providers are among the very best in Oregon. This is closely modeled after legislation passed unanimously in the State of Washington (HB 1023, 2019) in response to the closures of adult care homes in their state.

The 2024 session is focused on housing, and SB 1591 will unlock more housing for Oregon seniors.

Lastly, my commitment to this bill is deeply personal. My mother was in an adult care home towards the end of her life, during an incredibly painful and stressful period for her as well as myself and my siblings. The high-quality, personalized care and individualized attention that she was given would never have been possible in a residential care facility or nursing home. That option should be available to every Oregon senior.

This problem is more than just challenging to adult care home providers and their patients; it's existential. Adult care homes will no longer exist in Oregon if we fail to act urgently. Oregon seniors cannot afford to continue waiting longer. While increased rates and wages are a crucial piece to addressing this issue, they are not the only tool. We must think creatively and find solutions that get Oregon seniors access to the housing and care that they deserve.

Oregon seniors need affordable housing and high-quality care. They deserve better than to be forced to choose from a small handful of large, corporate institutions. But that is quickly becoming our new reality.

SB 1591 will provide a lifeline to adult care homes in Oregon, ensuring they can continue to offer the high-quality, personalized care that my mother and countless other Oregonians have benefited from. This bill is not just about expanding our housing supply for seniors; it's about preserving the dignity and quality of life for our seniors and making sure this compassionate care option is accessible to all.

Thank you for considering my testimony on this critical issue.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Meek".

Mark Meek
State Senator - Oregon Senate District 20