

Submitter: David Heslam

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure: SB1537

I am writing to oppose Senate Bill 1537.

I strongly believe that historically underserved communities need to have their concerns on housing understood and that action should be taken to address their concerns. But the work needs to be put in with those communities first. New policy ideas like Senate Bill 1537 should not be rushed to the capitol without deep engagement with the community members that this bill purports to protect. I have asked community leaders in North Portland where I live, and where displacement has been an issue, to see if anyone has been consulted about this bill. No one even knew this bill existed, let alone being consulted about it.

If the committee would like to analyze this issue, I would commend them for taking it on, but rushing through Senate Bill 1537 during a short session is just a terrible idea. Whenever my organization starts a new dialog with a community group I am reminded that the conversation is probably going to take a lot longer than I thought it would, more like years than weeks, but when its important, then that's the right way to approach the issue. In my experience, members of historically disadvantaged communities are very wary of any "rush to protect" them. They know it usually has not worked out in their best interest in the long run and the "rush" was really about benefiting someone else, often the one proposing the rush in the first place.

Since Senate Bill 1537 does not seem to have been constructed in collaboration with the communities it would impact, I urge you to not pass this bill out of committee. The language of the bill is sweeping, requiring a yet-to-be defined housing cost analysis any time any of the 12 named agencies proposes to change any rule under which that agency operates. If I am reading the bill correctly, then this bill would even trump a directive from the legislature to an agency to change a rule, if that agency determines that it cannot change that rule without the risk of displacing a member of a community. The extent of the limitations this bill would place on state government seem extraordinary. Just the effort to fully understand what this bill proposes to do, and how it would impact state government, will probably take longer than the entire 2022 legislative session. That's another reason this the topics of displacement and housing affordability should be tackled by a broader group of stakeholders than the seemingly limited set that have brought this forward.

If the committee decides to pursue deeper exploration of this topic, then I would be eager to participate. My organization, Earth Advantage, works closely with affordable housing organizations to make their housing better and we offer discounted or free

services to community groups that are building new affordable housing or housing for previously displaced families.

Thank you for the work you do on housing in Oregon.

-David