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2/24/2021

Re: HB 2761 - Support

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Morgan, Vice-Chair Campos, and Members of the House Housing Committee:

Verde is grateful for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2761, which would provide much needed protections and advance racial justice in manufactured housing. HB 2761 ensures that important information like rental agreements and applications are available in the five most commonly spoken languages in a given county other than English, a common sense practice that would provide much needed consumer protections. This is important to Verde because we organize in Cully, a NE Portland neighborhood that has six mobile home parks.

Manufactured housing is a source of desperately needed affordable housing, typically for older adults, people living with disabilities, veterans, immigrants, and families with young children, many of whom are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other People of Color.

Mobile home parks across the state, of which there are many, especially in rural communities, are home to many communities similar to those in Cully, many people. They are people who experience harm and discrimination in other parts of their lives, and are exploited through policies, programs, and practices that they don't often have power to influence. The origin of HB 2761 is community organizing and is intended to address an express need for residents that emerges time and time again across all rental housing, but especially manufactured housing.

Those needs emerge because some park owners take advantage of language barriers to trap people into agreements that they do not fully understand, or expectations that they were not carefully prepared to meet, simply by refusing to translate key documents. They take advantage of our housing crisis and people who need a home quickly or who have other restrictions that prevent them from finding broad housing options, such as police reports for domestic violence incidents. Many of us would not sign a document we didn't

understand, but many folk often feel like they don't have a choice. Similarly, applications ask for personal information, and especially for immigrants and refugees or people who have concerns associated with certain forms of documentation, having a clear understanding of what information is requested on an application is an essential family safety measure.

Manufactured housing also creates a challenging housing stability and quality scenario in which people often rent the pad or site in the park and own their structure. Requirements to live in a community are often more complicated than a typical stick-built rental agreement. This is already a lot to navigate, and it is imperative that every person who lives in a park have clear understanding of the expectations in their preferred language. These complications are particularly important around repair and maintenance requirements, as many of the park-owned units, or units sold on the market are older models in poor condition that require rehabilitation or repairs. It is key for residents to know what is their responsibility and when they can advocate for a park owner to make health and safety updates.

In 2019, Living Cully, a community coalition organized by Verde, worked with community members to establish manufactured housing zoning across the City of Portland as an anti-displacement measure, and simultaneously worked to purchase the Oak Leaf Mobile home park and transfer ownership to St. Vincent De Paul. We advocate for non-profit or cooperative ownership because those scenarios provide more clear protections and expectations, make it easier to replace or repair homes, and provide more general community safety and stability. Until every park is owned by the people who live there or an entity designed to support them, there will be risks associated with tenant-landlord relationships. HB 2761 goes a long way toward mitigating some of those risks.

While there are many good mom and pop park owners, there are others who take advantage of residents, and the miscommunication that can occur through complicated documents like those addressed in HB 276 — especially when they are presented in a language that is not the first language of many. HB 2761 creates a level playing field to help people establish clear understanding about their housing situation, expectations, and rights.

Verde believes that HB 2761 is a move in the right direction, but we would support future legislation that expands this practice and expectation to all tenant documents as a basic right. People have the right to understand any document that they are asked to share personal information on, or to sign, and HB 2761 ensures that at least mobile home park residents will have that much needed certainty. We urge the committee to support HB 2761 by referring it to the House floor with a do pass recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily".

Energy, Climate, and Transportation Manager
Verde