



HOUSING ALLIANCE

February 2, 2022

House Committee on Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice Chair Morgan, Vice Chair Campos, Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to express our support for HB 4215, which would make important changes to our processes for screening fees for tenants.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of more than ninety organizations from all parts of the state. Our members have come together with the knowledge that housing opportunity is the foundation on which all success is built – individual success as students, parents, workers, and community members as well as the success of our communities. We represent a diverse set of voices including affordable housing developers, residents of affordable housing, local jurisdictions, and organizations working to meet basic needs in every corner of our state.

We believe that all Oregonians need a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

In Oregon, three out of four households with extremely low incomes pay over half of their income towards rent. When people pay that much of their income towards rent, they have too few resources left over for food, medicine, or utilities. An emergency of a few hundred dollars may mean they end up experiencing homelessness.

In addition to the many factors that cause rent burdens among many Oregonians, the very search for new housing can easily cause new or exacerbate current financial hardships. In the State of Oregon, a landlord may charge a prospective tenant an applicant screening fee to cover the cost of obtaining information on the applicant, and to cover the costs of checking references and obtaining a credit report.

In the event a landlord denies an application, they must disclose at the time of the denial that the information from the screening agency or credit reporting agency is the reason. While the tenant has the right to dispute any inaccurate information, they are not able to reclaim the fee paid in screening fees, resulting in a sunk cost for the prospective tenant.

HB 4215, which is championed by Representative Nathanson, would help mitigate the significant costs associated with a tenants' search for a new home. This bill make several critical changes to the current laws related to screening fees, including: Clarifying the requirement that landlords must provide a receipt to tenants upon payment of a screening fee; Set specific requirements for the time period to return a screening fee if the tenant was not screened (14 days); Require a landlord to provide information to a tenant upon application that would inform a tenant of their rights to have their screening fee returned if their application was

not screened; and Increase the penalty for screening fees that were not returned when the tenant should have recovered the screening fee. Together, these important changes will result in more transparency for people who are applying to rent a home, and we believe, potentially reduce their costs to apply for homes.

A fifty dollar or a sixty dollar application fee by itself is no small sum for Oregonians with low incomes, but paying this fee over and over again for the purpose of furnishing the same information to different landlords adds up quickly and may put the prospective tenant in a financially precarious position. A tenant can be charged this fee for every adult in the household, meaning the search for an apartment can be a significant expenditure.

In recent years, we've had the opportunity to talk both to case managers who assist people in finding and securing housing, as well as tenants who are applying for rental housing themselves. We hear stories in which they are paying repeated screening fees and incurring several hundred dollars in costs. Many tenants do not understand the process or their rights because of the lack of transparency in the process. HB 4215 will help increase the transparency, and we hope, mean that more tenants have their fee returned to them if they are not ultimately screened for an apartment.

When people have safe and stable housing, it has important and significant benefits. Safe and stable housing that people can afford is key to accessing opportunity – unnecessary and mounting screening fees should not get in the way of this opportunity. Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state.

Sincerely,



Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
211info
Aging in the Gorge
Benton Habitat for Humanity
Bienestar
Bradley Angle
BRIDGE Housing
Business for a Better Portland
CASA of Oregon
Cascade AIDS Project
Central City Concern
Chrisman Development
Church Women United of Lane County
City of Beaverton
City of Eugene
City of Forest Grove
City of Hillsboro
City of Hood River
City of Portland
City of Tigard
Clackamas County
Coalition of Community Health Clinics
Coalition of Housing Advocates
College Housing Northwest
Community Action Partnership of Oregon
Community Action Team
Community Action Program of East Central Oregon
(CAPECO)
Community Alliance of Tenants
Community Development Partners
Community Housing Fund
Community Partners for Affordable Housing
Community Services Consortium
Community Vision
Cornerstone Community Housing
DevNW
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Enterprise Community Partners
Fair Housing Council of Oregon
Farmworker Housing Development Corp.
FOOD for Lane County
Habitat for Humanity of Oregon
Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East
Hacienda CDC
Home Forward
Homes for Good
Horizon Project, Inc.
Housing Authorities of Oregon
Housing Authority of Clackamas County
Housing Development Center
Housing Oregon
Human Solutions
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
Innovative Housing, Inc.

Interfaith Alliance on Poverty
JOIN
Lane County Health and Human Services
League of Oregon Cities
League of Women Voters of Oregon
Lincoln County
Looking Glass Community Services
Mainstream Housing Inc.
Metro
Mercy Housing Northwest
Mid-Columbia Housing Authority
Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency
NAYA Family Center
Neighborhood Partnerships
NeighborImpact
NeighborWorks Umpqua
Network for Oregon Affordable Housing
Northwest Housing Alternatives
Northwest Pilot Project
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon Consumer Justice
Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities
Oregon Food Bank
Our Children Oregon
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Portland Community College
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
Portland Housing Center
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Portland: Neighbors Welcome
Proud Ground
Raphael House
REACH CDC
Residents Organizing for Change (ROC Oregon)
Rogue Action Center
Rose CDC
St. Francis Shelter
St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Inc.
ShelterCare
Sisters Habitat for Humanity
Sponsors, Inc.
Springfield Eugene Tenant Association (SETA)
SquareOne Villages
Street Roots
Think Real Estate
Transition Projects
Washington County
Welcome Home Coalition
West Tuality Habitat for Humanity
Wishcamper Development Partners