February 3, 2026

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Re: Support for SB1523 (Bridging the Digital Divide)

Dear Chair Pham, Vice Chair Anderson and Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development:

My name is Jason Coulthurst, and I have worked at NW Pilot Project for nearly 20 years serving extremely low-income seniors in Multnomah County, many of whom are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. I am writing to express concern about the growing reliance on online-only housing application systems and the barriers they create for the people we serve.

We appreciate the housing providers we work with and recognize their efforts to expand access to affordable housing. However, the shift to online-only applications has created significant obstacles for seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals who often lack reliable internet access, devices, or the ability to navigate complex digital systems. Access to housing should not depend on a person's ability to afford or use technology.
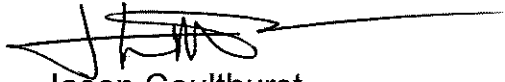
Account creation requirements are a major barrier. Clients frequently do not receive confirmation emails, sometimes later learn they were never added to waitlists, or are locked out of accounts due to system errors. We frequently encounter loops where a system will say an account does not exist, but when a new account is created it will state that the email address already exists in their system, so the client is basically stuck with moving forward with an application. These are not minor inconveniences, they directly prevent people from applying for housing, and some clients simply give up and don't apply at all.

I have two recent examples from just last week. One client was required to receive a verification code by text message to create an account. Because he has very basic phone service due to limited income, his phone would not display the code unless he paid for enhanced messaging services costing $1.99 per month. Another client I assisted in late October with an online housing application

received an email confirming she had been added to a housing waitlist. However, just this past week, she received a follow-up email from the property stating, "We noticed you have not yet submitted an application. We don't want you to miss out on your home." These examples illustrate how these systems can create confusion and leave a client unsure where they are in the process and it can often take considerable effort to determine what the actual application status really is.

The housing application process must be accessible, reliable, and fair. Allowing paper applications upon request is a simple, effective solution that would immediately reduce barriers and ensure vulnerable community members are not excluded due to digital access issues. Thank you for your time and consideration of this very important bill.

Sincerely,

Jason Coulthurst
Housing Access Manager
NW Pilot Project
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