



Testimony to Oregon Senate Committee on Housing and Development

Date: February 8, 2024

Re: SB 1537

Dear Chair Jama, Vice Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

Better Housing Together is a Eugene-based housing advocacy organization with a mission “to increase housing affordability, diversity and supply in Lane County.” Oregon needs action in all three areas – affordability, diversity and supply – to see meaningful progress against our housing and homelessness crisis. Our organization’s commitment to addressing these issues in the southern Willamette Valley is the basis of our support for SB 1537.

Since 2017, Better Housing Together has been working in our community and at the state-level to address homelessness and support the full continuum of housing needs, from PSH to Affordable Housing, workforce housing, and market-rate housing. With our network of more than 50 multisector partners, we have seen Eugene, Springfield, and Lane County take measurable steps to plan for, fund, and implement solutions to this crisis. As with SB 1537, this work has been most effective when supported by a broad group of diverse partners.

Our organization’s testimony in support is consistent with previous testimony in support of SB 1051, SB 608, HB 2001, Climate-Friendly and Equitable Communities, and many others – bills and actions that address our housing crisis by encouraging supporting walkable and age-friendly neighborhoods, addressing price-gouging, encouraging infill, and orienting our planning outcomes toward greater equity and sustainability. All of these actions and new laws reflect a commitment to uncover housing solutions and deliver meaningful progress.

Thank you to Governor Kotek and her team for their work to develop this bill and encourage us to imagine a future in which Oregon takes up the challenge of improving our landmark land use system, including Goal 10. We believe SB 1537 can help us meet the intent of that comprehensive system, hold true to Oregon’s conservation ethic, and provide the housing needed by communities. As we have seen over many years, our shared future rests on an approach like what Governor Kotek described before the committee – we know our values, but we need to face our challenges, bring forward solutions, and keep working until the policy fits.

The investments included with this bill are critical. SB 1537’s proposed site acquisition funding, infrastructure investments and funds for workforce housing – as well as affordability requirements, climate-friendly incentives, and binding “complete community” planning requirements – are all commendable. In Eugene/Springfield, the \$227,000 target for new, affordability-controlled homeownership identified by this bill is about 50% of our 2023 median home price. Our ongoing urban reserves planning process supports the work to identify where new housing might be appropriate, and we expect the creation of the Housing Accountability and Production Office will provide ongoing support. As we are testing new levers to support production and affordability, funding for the work of local governments will be key.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and for your work to address Oregon’s housing crisis.