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To: The Senate Committee on Housing and Development

RE: SB 1530, Healthy Homes Funding

To Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Siraat Younas, and I am the Climate Justice Associate at Community Energy Project. I am writing on behalf of Community Energy Project (CEP) to express our strong support for the investment in the Healthy Homes Repair fund in the -2 amendment to SB 1530. We thank the Committee for increasing the amount from \$5 to \$7.5 million but urge the committee to consider further investments to help vulnerable households maintain their housing, lower living expenses, and enhance health and resilience.

CEP is a community based organization that serves over 1,500 households each year that are low income, BIPOC, seniors, people with disabilities, and immigrant households. We work directly with families in need of critical home health and safety repairs, who are struggling with outdated and unsafe wiring, poor air quality, leaking roofs, extreme temperatures and energy inefficiency. To this aim, we work with dozens of households every year to oversee construction, repairs, and weatherization upgrades. This funding would help organizations like CEP further expand our reach to vulnerable communities that depend on us for these crucial services.

Recent weather events - from ice storms this winter to smoke events in the previous summer - have highlighted how the Healthy Homes Program can improve health outcomes for Oregonians by focusing on home repairs and upgrades. Efficient homes in good repair result in lower pollution, higher climate resilience, better indoor air quality, lower energy bills, and reduced stress. Clients have shared stories with us about the toll poor housing conditions and high energy bills have on their mental and physical health, especially when some tenants have small children or existing health problems.

Ensuring further investments in this program will fill the gaps left by existing energy efficiency and weatherization funding, helping to fund essential home repairs and upgrades. Attached below are stories highlighting the importance of this funding and its impact on the health, safety and affordability for low income Oregonians. The legislature must prioritize a budget that will cut climate pollution, improve health, and lower energy bills across the state.

While the initial funding was a good start, we urge the Committee to dedicate more funds to keep this crucial program going. Increased funding will help more nonprofits to braid funding and stack energy incentives so that our lowest income households – those who need these services the most – can actually take advantage of them. We do not want to see our most vulnerable clients left behind yet again.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Siraat Younas
Climate Justice Associate
Community Energy Project



Stories from the Field: A Case for Healthy Homes

Efficient homes are better for the environment, increase climate resilience against extreme temperatures, improve indoor and outdoor air quality, reduce energy burdens, and increase the comfort and safety of residents' homes. Low Income people are less able to afford costly repairs and upgrades, and thus may need to rely on free weatherization and energy efficiency programs. Often, these efficiency upgrades cannot be completed without structural repairs to address issues such as leaking roofs and old, unsafe electrical. However, traditional weatherization funding programs have a restrictive budget for structural repairs which are too costly for many people to afford.

With increased funding and flexibility, we have the opportunity to address the needs of our most vulnerable populations including low-income households, those facing high linguistic isolation, individuals lacking generational home ownership or repair skills, those without the financial means for repairs, the elderly, and those with disabilities.

Community Energy Project (CEP) is a nonprofit serving Portland, Oregon since 1979. CEP provides home repairs, weatherization, and energy upgrades to vulnerable communities. These are stories from CEP clients who had critical home health and safety needs, such as issues with outdated and unsafe wiring, poor air quality, leaking roofs, extreme temperatures and energy inefficiency. Their stories highlight the need for further investments for structural repairs, and the importance of energy efficiency and weatherization upgrades to ensure that those who need it the most are not left behind.

Dominick & Annette

Dominick was interning with CEP to be an energy efficiency professional. During his internship, he told CEP about his mother, Annette, who needed the exact kind of work he was learning to do, and CEP scheduled an assessment.

CEP found that Annette's home had an urgent need for energy improvements. There was no insulation in the walls and hardly any in the attic, her gas furnace was inefficient and old, and her roof was leaking. The roof leak caused water damage making it more vulnerable to mold and collapse, and there was standing water on the outdated, fire prone knob and tube wiring in the attic. After assessing the condition of the roof and necessary electrical work, Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF)¹ support was not allowable because the costs for roof replacement

¹ The Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) is a grant program within the City of Portland that is creating green jobs, funding improvements to homes through renewable energy and energy efficiency investments, and supporting minority owned businesses.

and electrical repairs needed to bring the home to code were in excess of the PCEF requirements that state no more than 40% of the project budget can be used for structural repairs. Dominick, who had been doing work in two homes up to this point, had to watch his mother get turned away for services. Not from a lack of need, but due to insufficient repair funding, even from a program like PCEF that includes repair funds.

Betty & Paul

Betty and Paul Green are an elderly Black couple who have lived in their home for more than 40 years. Their 1916 home has had a number of issues due to outdated and potentially harmful measures installed over the years. CEP found two major asbestos hazards: vermiculite in the attic from the 1950s and asbestos tile. Asbestos is a hazardous fiber known to cause serious health problems, including lung cancer. In addition, a leaking roof caused extensive damage to the ceiling and walls which makes the inside of the home more vulnerable to outside temperatures. The electrical is over 100 years old, the water heater needed to be updated, and the furnace still uses oil heat. Community Energy Project was able to utilize Energy Trust of Oregon's Community Partner Funding to replace the Green's water heater.

Due to lack of funding programs that allowed for the replacement of Betty and Paul's roof and other needed repairs, CEP was unable to provide any further energy efficient upgrades in the home without adversely impacting their home's thermal envelope. Ultimately, Betty and Paul's home had too many underlying structural issues that were beyond the scope of what could be funded.

Basant Family

The Basant family is a three generation immigrant family of four from Fiji living at 30% Median Family Income (MFI). Their home had no central heat due to a broken furnace they couldn't afford to repair or replace. The family relied on expensive and inefficient electric resistance space heaters, and, following a blower door test, CEP found that the heat from the space heaters dissipated quickly, greatly increasing their energy burden.

By the winter of 2022, the family experienced illnesses and lost wages, due in part to the cold and damp conditions of their home. The deteriorating roof prevented the replacement of the central heating system or any weatherization measures or energy upgrades in the home. In this case, CEP was able to get concessions from various funding programs to cover the cost of roof repairs, which enabled other upgrades. The Basant family had the "right" combination of issues that allowed CEP to resolve the home's problems, including replacing the furnace. There are many other homes that are just as vulnerable as the Basant household, but the inability to secure funding outside of the Portland metro region is further exacerbated when homes need excessive repairs that often fall outside of the scope of the programs. This family's exceptional story should be the norm, where all families in need of crucial services can

receive help.

Conclusion

Every person deserves to live in a safe, healthy, and efficient home. While there are valuable funding sources and programs available to Oregonians, we can still do better. Organizations like CEP encounter significant challenges stemming from high cost and deferred maintenance issues like roof leaks, leaks causing mold, outdated wiring, asbestos ducting, and vermiculite in the homes we visit. These pre-existing problems impede the installation of insulation, making it imperative to address these critical repairs before proceeding with weatherization efforts and energy efficiency upgrades. Out of the 192 homes that CEP visited, 33% of clients had roofing repair or replacement needs, another 5% had vermiculite present, and 14% had outdated knob and tube wiring. Roof repairs alone are high cost and many homes face multiple repair needs that add even more to the project's overall budget, making it that much harder to carry out critical home services.

Ultimately, these repairs pose a considerable financial hurdle to overcome through existing funding programs and too often clients in need remain unserved. The inability to secure adequate funding for structural repairs hampers the ability to fulfill the demand for weatherization services and energy efficiency measures, and underscores the urgent need for alternative funding solutions to address these home maintenance issues. With increased funding, we can ensure that our most vulnerable people in the most unsafe housing are not the ones most likely to be turned away from crucial services.