



February 11, 2021

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for SB 291

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. OCO is the result of the merger between two historic Oregon non-profits: The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon and Children First For Oregon. We elevate data and lived experience to prioritize children and center communities. We continue to connect a community of 115 advocates, coalitions, and organizations through The Children's Agenda, a legislative agenda championing equitable state legislative policies and shared investments to improve the lives of Oregon's children and their families.

SB 291: Nondiscrimination in tenant screening is part of the 2021 Children's Agenda.

We have a long history of racial discrimination in housing in our state and our country. If we are going to address the racial disparities of higher housing instability and lower homeownership rates, we have to address systemic issues in our current systems. SB 79 addressing racial disparities in homeownership, which you are also hearing today, is a priority of the 2021 Children Agenda. We see SB 291 as a key companion bill to address how tenant screenings have created barriers to entry into the housing market for too many Oregonians, particularly BIPOC individuals who have been caught up in the juvenile or adult justice systems.

We must move away from a one size fits all and applications or screening tools that may be seen on one hand as being more efficient, but on the other hand maintain or create barriers that perpetuate discrimination in housing. SB 291 with an amendment should address some of the current barriers in tenant screening through the following changes:

- A landlord must conduct an individualized assessment that does not reject an applicant for any of the following reasons:
 - Any arrest in an inactive case that did not result in

**The
Children's
Agenda**

is a broad slate of equitable investments and policy solutions to meet the holistic needs of Oregon children, youth, and their families.



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- conviction;
- Participation in or completion of a diversion or a deferral of judgment program
- Any conviction that has been vacated or expunged, or for which the applicant received a stay of imposition of sentencing and complied with the terms of the stay;
- Any conviction for a crime that is no longer illegal in the state of Oregon;
- Any conviction or any other determination or adjudication in the juvenile justice system.

It is also critical to require landlords to notify tenants at the time of receiving their application of their rights to submit supplemental evidence, and for landlords to consider all supplemental evidence provided by the applicant with a completed application to explain, justify, or negate the relevance of potentially negative information revealed by screening.

Housing is a basic need in our society, and we must do better to ensure that we remove barriers and ensure that rental screening processes are nondiscriminatory.

Thank you for your consideration and your service. We urge your support for SB 291.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Chis Coughlin, Policy, Advocacy, and Engagement Director

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

View the 2021 Children's Agenda at www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2021-childrens-agenda