

Submitter: Erin Meechan
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB599

Re: Support for SB 599
Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of SB 599, to ensure that all Oregonians have access to fair housing, regardless of their immigration or citizenship status. While most housing providers already adhere to best practices and do not discriminate based on citizenship or immigration status, the passage of the bill ensures that these principles are codified in our state statutes and sends a protective and inclusive message to our communities.

I know quite a few refugees from Somalia and Bosnia who have been in Oregon for over 15 years. They came here with their families to escape the brutal civil wars in their countries and witnessed horrific scenes in their neighborhoods. Sometimes even within their own families and as children. The asylum-seekers have legal status here, graduated from high school here, work and pay taxes, and raise their families but still struggle with housing discrimination and profiling. That does not reflect Oregon values and we need to solidify that discrimination is not acceptable here.

The bill is modeled after a provision in local ordinance in the City of Portland that has been in effect for years, and extends that protection statewide, ensuring consistency of protections across all communities. Four other states have similar statewide protections. (NY, WA, CA, IL)

It is also important to clarify that this bill does not interfere with federal housing programs. Some Housing Oregon members are required by federal law to ask about immigration status as a condition of participation in programs like HUD rental assistance. SB 599 does not prohibit these federally required inquiries and will not create compliance issues for affordable housing providers participating in those programs.

We appreciate the Oregon Law Center's work on this issue to ensure the bill is clear and workable for landlords and housing providers alike. We also appreciate this committee's thoughtful approach in crafting this legislation. Note that technical amendments are pending to the bill to ensure that the language accomplishes the above intent.

For myself, my neighbors, and my friends we must stand strong in our values that Oregonians will not tolerate housing discriminatory practices period.

For all of these reasons, I urge your strong support of this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Oregon communities.
Sincerely,

Erin Meechan, Gresham Oregon