



House Committee on Housing & Homelessness
Testimony in support of HB 2001 with -1 Amendments
February 14, 2023

My name is Bob Bruce. I am a resident of Salem, Oregon and a volunteer on the AARP Oregon Executive Council. In retirement, I've spent the past 20 years as a community volunteer: five years managing a soup kitchen in Corvallis, 10 years helping Oregonians find health care as a Medicare volunteer; and 17 years helping people do free tax returns.

I've met thousands of Oregon seniors and low-income families who struggle to put food on the table, buy costly prescriptions and manage meager household budgets to pay rent and other costs. I've heard heartfelt personal stories and I have seen desperation in the eyes of many Oregonians who struggle to pay everyday expenses.

Those stories are personal to me. And that's why I'm here to testify today on behalf of AARP in support of HB 2001 with the -1 Amendments. I believe, as do many of my AARP colleagues and friends, that this bill will enact much-needed reforms, provide critical access to services in communities across the state, and create innovative models of increasing affordable housing supply. The bill will provide greater housing stability to our vulnerable neighbors, friends and family members in urban and rural areas.

As you know, AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social change organization. Our nationwide membership is nearly 38 million, with over 500,000 members in Oregon. We work to strengthen communities with a focus on health security and financial stability. An important aspect of our work in Oregon is advocating for livable and age-friendly communities, including expanding housing options and ensuring affordable, safe, secure, and accessible homes for Oregonians of all ages and abilities.

The -1 Amendment contains several elements designed so we can live up to our obligation, provide for those who are unsheltered and homeless and increase our housing supply. Specifically, the -1:

- Provides essential and reasonable negotiated improvements to Oregon's eviction statutes to promote stability and payment rather than displacement and eviction.
- Expands investments in youth homelessness prevention, providing services for school-aged children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.
- Gives authority to allow the Governor's recent Executive Orders relating to homelessness to apply to the whole state, removing the current barrier to this application.
- Provides \$20 million in grant/loan funds, for the construction of low-cost modular housing in wildfire affected areas and for low- and moderate-income households.
- Provides \$3 million in seed financing for the construction of affordable workforce rental housing.

During the pandemic, AARP was proud to join with advocates from around the state to call for action to reduce evictions and keep people safe and stable in their homes. And we were pleased lawmakers took necessary action.

But now we must do more. Our housing crisis is not over in Oregon. In fact, for many the disruptions from the pandemic --increased caregiving responsibilities, rising health care costs, and loss of income – have meant greater housing instability.

The numbers tell the story. AARP data shows that this year, more than 5,600 adults – age 45 and older – will experience homelessness in Oregon. An even higher number, almost 7,000 Oregonians – 45 and older – are expected to be evicted from their homes. Our data show that more than 50% of Oregonians experiencing homelessness and facing evictions are older adults.

We need many solutions to solve our critical humanitarian crisis. HB 2001 with the -1 Amendments takes multiple approaches designed to address homelessness response, increase housing supply, and prevent eviction-caused homelessness.

We must act now to offer greater protection to the most vulnerable of our neighbors and provide them the time and support necessary to get the assistance needed to prevent homelessness.

On behalf of over half million AARP members ages 50+ statewide, I respectfully urge this committee to adopt the -1 Amendments and pass HB 2001. Oregonians need your help and leadership once again.