



HOUSING ALLIANCE

March 2, 2021

House Committee on Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Morgan, Vice-Chair Campos, Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to share our perspective on HB 2100.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of more than ninety organizations from all parts of the state. Our members have come together with the knowledge that housing opportunity is the foundation on which all of our success is built – individual success as students, parents, workers, and community members as well as the success of our communities.

We represent a diverse set of voices including community action agencies, affordable housing developers, residents of affordable housing, local jurisdictions, and organizations working to meet basic needs in every corner of our state.

A safe and stable place to call home is a basic human need.

Today, we simply don't have enough affordable homes for people who need them. People – our neighbors and members of our community – are struggling with homelessness, housing instability, rent burdens, and to make ends meet and put food on the table, particularly during this pandemic.

Today, racial disparities exist throughout our systems and structures. Because of systemic and institutional racism, our BIPOC community members experience higher rates of homelessness, housing instability, and rent burden than their White peers, and lower rates of access to homeownership. People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately people of color, compared to their representation in the general population. The national Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC) report¹ on homelessness and disparities notes:

“Although Black people comprise 13% of the general population in the United States and 26% of those living in poverty, they account for more than 40% of the homeless population suggesting that poverty rates alone do not explain the over-representation.”

¹ <https://c4innovates.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SPARC-Phase-1-Findings-March-2018.pdf>

In Oregon, the 2019 Point in Time count² showed that while Black Oregonians make up 1.9% of the general population, they make up 6% of people experiencing homelessness who were counted in 2019.

We have a responsibility to change the system that has led to these disparate outcomes and in making sure our systems, structures, and outcomes, are equitable. We seek a system that moves beyond one that does not exacerbate or perpetuate racial disparities, to one that is built to consistently and actively reduce them. We want to work collaboratively to transform our system into one that can help us achieve the community we want - where everyone has a place to call home, and homelessness is rare and brief if it occurs.

The current statute and funding allocation methodology means that only Community Action Agencies can be direct grant recipients of OHCS for two sources of funding that serve folks at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and that culturally specific providers cannot be direct grant recipients of OHCS. This system offers disparate opportunities for organizations to partner with and receive sub-grants from Community Action Agencies, who can choose to subgrant the dollars they receive to providers in their communities. Some have demonstrated a commitment to forming collaborative relationships with other providers in their communities, including reaching out to and supporting capacity building within culturally specific providers, but there is a lack of consistency due to the absence of performance standards in this area. Lastly, because the subcontracting relationship depends on the willingness of the Community Action Agency to partner with other organizations, this creates an inherent power imbalance.

We want to flag this, in particular, for you, as the Committee, that this power imbalance may impact whose voices you hear in this conversation. For discussions within the Housing Alliance, I am concerned that we did not hear some perspectives because we were unable to truly address that power dynamic.

Culturally responsive mainstream organizations can support people of color in their community and to provide access, translation, interpretation, and hire bilingual and bicultural staff. However, it is important to recognize that mainstream organizations (Community Action Agencies and others) do not and cannot fill the same role as a culturally specific provider.

Culturally specific providers have preexisting trusted relationships with community. These providers can build inclusive spaces in which people feel safe and feel they belong; they understand a shared history of trauma as a result of racism or experiences of the community; they share language, culture, and experiences; and they provide support. These culturally specific agencies do amazing work in their communities, and they deserve the opportunity to access direct funding, and to have the power to choose when and how they partner with other agencies.

We further recognize that access to resources, like funding, is not the only element that we believe best serves BIPOC communities disproportionately experiencing homelessness throughout our state. The ability for those communities and the trusted organizations that serve them also must have access to be a direct part of the state's feedback and decision-making framework. Equity is not just about outcomes that people experience, but also who sits at the decision-making table.

² <https://public.tableau.com/profile/oregon.housing.and.community.services#!/vizhome/2019Point-in-TimeDashboard/Story1>

In our discussions, the Housing Alliance did not seek to find a compromise, but instead to identify our shared values, to work to center racial justice in our values, to consider what we want from our system, and to think about the way in which this work is carried forward, and how it will be implemented for providers ultimately who work with people experiencing homelessness.

Given that the implementation date in the -1 amendments is July 1, 2022, our current position is to suggest that a task force should be created, who could recommend changes to the 2022 Legislature, changes that could and should be implemented on the same timeline of July 1, 2022.

If created, any task force should have a narrow and explicit focus to prioritize and center racial equity, and to recommend legislation and changes to funding structures that would support our homeless service system to achieve year over year decreases in racial disparities, and achieve more equitable outcomes.

In recommending this course of action, I want to acknowledge the long history of asking communities of color to wait for justice and for action. I know that asking for a task force is another form of asking people to wait, and I do not take this recommendation lightly. We want deeply to see better outcomes for our BIPOC communities, to have this system listen to the voices of community, and we believe that this course of action, in combination with statutory changes, could lead to more significant improvements than simply 20% of the resources being available for RFP.

If considered, any task force should include a range of perspectives, including Legislators, OHCS, the Governor's Racial Justice Council, Community Action Agencies, culturally specific homeless service providers, and urban and rural homeless service providers. Any task force should include a range of perspectives from across the homeless service continuum, and organizations who serve different types of populations (youth, families, adults, seniors, survivors of domestic and sexual violence) experiencing homelessness. Any task force should include people with lived experience with homelessness.

If considered, any task force should have a strong mandate and responsibility to work together, and to suggest critical and important changes. We hope that members of any task force - should it be created - will come to the table to work collaboratively, to listen to the voices of our BIPOC community members, and to advance real solutions.

In addition, we would recommend:

- Approving many of the statutory changes proposed in HB 2100. It is our understanding that there is already significant agreement on some of the proposed language changes.
- If a task force is created, funding for staff to ensure appropriate support for the work.
- An additional \$10 million for OHCS to contract directly with culturally specific housing providers in FY 2021-22 to begin to address current needs among communities of color, and to provide necessary technical assistance or capacity building support.

I want to share with you, as you consider HB 2100 and this testimony, that the Housing Alliance includes many homeless service providers who are doing amazing work in our community, and includes several culturally specific housing providers. We also include many organizations who work directly with their Community Action Agency. We have work to do to include more culturally specific homeless service providers, rural homeless service providers, and other

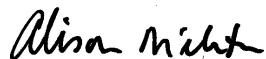
community based organizations who work directly with BIPOC communities. Their voices should be included in the broader conversation of HB 2100.

I want to reflect within the Housing Alliance meetings on this topic, I heard a strong call for racial justice and equity, and for bolder, faster changes. I heard some members express strong support for allowing 100% of funds to be competitively allocated. I heard that whatever course of action is pursued, that there must be measurable improvements in outcomes for BIPOC communities.

I want to share the deep sense of urgency I heard from our members, and ask you to act with urgency. This issue must be discussed in this Legislative session. In various forms, changes to this system have been discussed for many years, and I hope you will take up this call, and take action this session.

We want to be clear, also, that we will be closely monitoring the process and outcomes of this proposal. Regardless of what happens, if the recommended changes do not lead to the outcomes that BIPOC communities are asking for, we will consider bringing legislation forward in either 2022 or 2023 to address any remaining concerns, such as clear direction on the inclusion of culturally specific organizations in both funding and decision making.

Sincerely,



Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
211info
Aging in the Gorge
Benton Habitat for Humanity
Bienestar
Bradley Angle
BRIDGE Housing
Business for a Better Portland
CASA of Oregon
Central City Concern
Chrisman Development
Church Women United of Lane County
City of Beaverton
City of Eugene
City of Forest Grove
City of Hillsboro
City of Hood River
City of Portland
City of Tigard
Clackamas County
Coalition of Community Health Clinics
Coalition of Housing Advocates
College Housing Northwest
Community Action Partnership of Oregon
Community Action Team
Community Alliance of Tenants
Community Development Partners
Community Housing Fund
Community Partners for Affordable Housing
Community Vision
Cornerstone Community Housing
DevNW
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Enterprise Community Partners
Fair Housing Council of Oregon
Farmworker Housing Development Corp.
FOOD for Lane County
Habitat for Humanity of Oregon
Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East
Hacienda CDC
Home Forward
Homes for Good
Housing Authorities of Oregon
Housing Authority of Clackamas County
Housing Development Center
Housing Oregon
Human Solutions
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
Impact Northwest
Innovative Housing, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance on Poverty
JOIN
Lane County Health and Human Services
League of Oregon Cities
League of Women Voters of Oregon
Lincoln County
Looking Glass Community Services
Mainstream Housing Inc.
Metro
Mid-Columbia Housing Authority
NAYA Family Center
Neighborhood Partnerships
Neighborhood Impact
NeighborWorks Umpqua
Network for Oregon Affordable Housing
Northwest Housing Alternatives
Northwest Pilot Project
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities
Oregon Food Bank
Our Children Oregon
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Portland: Neighbors Welcome
Proud Ground
Raphael House
REACH CDC
Residents Organizing for Change (ROC) Oregon
Rogue Action Center
Rose CDC
St. Francis Shelter
St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Inc.
ShelterCare
Sisters Habitat for Humanity
Sponsors, Inc.
SquareOne Villages
Street Roots
Think Real Estate
Transition Projects
Washington County
Welcome Home Coalition