

January 31, 2023

Good morning Madam Chair and members of the Housing and Homeless Committee.

My name is Helen Higgins, I am the CEO for the Boys & Girls Club of Corvallis. I am representing employers our community in support of HB 2981.

I am leading a grass roots workforce coalition here in Corvallis to develop a pilot around employer assisted housing. Our goal is to find a way to secure affordable housing for our workforce as we work to recruit and retain them into our jobs. We are in a staffing crisis.

This group consists of my organization, Samaritan Health Services,(our regional hospital), Corvallis School District, Oregon State University, DevNW, a nonprofit housing developer and other local social service agencies that serve children and families. We have come together as private and public employers to do something different and creative to address our urgent housing needs – because there's a direct link between an available workforce and a place to live.

I'd like to share an example of our housing crisis - yesterday local realtor did a search on of the MLS to see what our inventory looked like - we have a total of 48 houses for sale

Our rental vacancy rate in Corvallis is consistently low As a small college town, students require housing so rental rates move between 2-4%. This is in a city of 59,000 people. That means, basically there's no place to live.

HB 2981 is one way we can create incentives for builders to build housing that could move prices back into a range that our workforce could afford.

From my vantage point of working to sustain a community, we have to put as much, if not more attention and resources for workforce housing or we will become a community, and a state where only the very low and the very high income resident can live. And that's not good for Oregon.

Thank you,