



February 22, 2023

Representative Maxine Dexter
Chair, House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
900 Court St NE, H-283
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for House Bill 2001

Dear Chair Dexter and Members of the Committee:

I write on behalf of Home Forward in strong support of House Bill 2001 which responds to the crisis of homelessness, improves stability and safety for renters across the state, and takes essential steps to resolve our long-standing housing supply challenges.

Home Forward is a Public Housing Authority (PHA) and the largest provider of affordable housing in the state of Oregon. We serve more than 15,500 Multnomah County low-income households by providing affordable housing, administering rent assistance, and providing supportive services. Our mission is to assure that the people of our community are sheltered. We own and manage over 6,000 homes throughout Multnomah County. We also provide households with services which range from youth supports to health and wellness. Meanwhile, we fund rent assistance for thousands of households residing in private unregulated housing that we do not directly oversee. We administer emergency rent assistance programs that benefit landlords and tenants alike, including Short Term Rent Assistance, the Landlord Compensation Fund, and the Landlord Guarantee Fund.

Renter Stabilization

HB 2001 provides meaningful protections for renters that advance housing stability during times of economic hardships. We know that renter stabilization is an essential ingredient in our response to the housing and homelessness crisis. Evictions remove people from their homes and exacerbate poverty by making it more difficult for families to find new homes. We know there are disparities in evictions that impact Black and brown households, women, transgender individuals, people with disabilities, and youth at higher rates than the general population. If we want to avoid further marginalizing already marginalized communities, we must reform the system.

At Home Forward, we prioritize housing stability and have begun to reform how we perform lease enforcement, implementing significant change on behalf of families we serve. Here are some examples:

- We provide 30 days' notice for nonpayment of rent to ensure households have time to catch up. This approach is aligned with a new Biden-Harris proposed rule that would require 30 days' notice in certain federally subsidized housing;
- We give residents the opportunity to enter into a repayment plan at any point in the lease enforcement process in order to avoid an eviction;
- We offer a right of redemption, allowing payment at any point in the process;
- We immediately discontinue an eviction court case when a family enters a repayment agreement, which removes the risk of further instability if they miss a future payment; and

- Throughout this process, we ensure households have access to emergency rent assistance resources.

Meanwhile, within our rent assistance programs, we see the barriers that evictions have on families attempting to find new housing in the private market. In response, we:

- Fund an expungement and eviction set aside clinic with Metropolitan Public Defenders;
- Fund housing search advocates to help with leasing; and
- Provide money to pay down bad debt, including rental debt.

Home Forward has taken a lot of steps that track the renter stabilization protections considered in HB 2001 including the extended notice period and the right of redemption. In some ways, such as notice timelines, we have gone further than the proposed requirements of HB 2001. But we know gaps still exist, and we need more comprehensive and consistent approaches in our housing market. HB 2001 is an important step in that direction.

Addressing Youth Homelessness

In addition to renter stabilization, HB 2001 also expands investments in youth homelessness prevention by prioritizing services for school-aged children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. Addressing the challenge of youth homelessness is both a moral imperative and a proactive measure that will have benefits for our housing system in the long term. Preventing young people from becoming homeless in the first place, and quickly getting youth into supportive, stable housing if and when they become homeless, is proven to help prevent a lifelong cycle of chronic homelessness.

At Home Forward, we know the importance and impact of such programs. Home Forward currently operates two tailored rent assistance programs for families with children attending two different elementary schools in East Portland. These programs couple valuable rent assistance dollars with wrap around family supportive services. We know that evictions, homelessness, and even mid-academic year moves result in a decline in the social skills, emotional wellbeing, and graduation rates of school aged children. Our programs are designed to keep children and their families stably housed to set each child up for success.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are grateful to legislative leaders for your bi-partisan, bi-cameral and immediate action on this package. Please contact Christina Dirks, Interim Director of Policy and Planning, Home Forward at 503-348-1196 or christina.dirks@homeforward.org regarding these comments.

Sincerely,



Christina Dirks
Interim Director of Policy and Planning
Home Forward