



February 18, 2019

House Committee on Human Services and Housing
Oregon Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chairs Noble and Sanchez, Members of the Committee,

As the COO of Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services (WNHS), along with our newly-merged partner NEDCO, I am writing to encourage your support for SB 608. We believe that healthy families and healthy communities begin where we live, work, and play: at home. Together, WNHS and NEDCO own almost 400 units of affordable rental housing across Lane, Linn, Benton, Lincoln, Marion, Polk, and Clackamas Counties. We also provide a wide array of resident services, financial literacy classes, first-time homebuyer programs, and neighborhood revitalization efforts.

At WNHS, we see firsthand the hardship caused for individuals, families, and whole communities by a lack of safe and affordable housing: from homeless veterans, to youth aging out of foster care with no place to go, to workers living in their cars, to families choosing rent over food and medicine – our housing crisis is putting far too many Oregonians at risk. Conversely, we also see the amazing impact of safe and stable housing, when kids do better in school, adults can maintain employment, and families become healthier.

The provisions of SB 608 are standards that affordable housing providers like WNHS and NEDCO have operating by for years. Like private landlords, we must operate our housing as a business, ensuring that each property has the income to cover debt servicing costs, long term maintenance, insurance, etc. We do this while maintaining a commitment to keeping our rents affordable well below market rates and housing hard-to-serve individuals. We plan ahead to implement small, annual rent increases, so that tenants are never surprised by a large increase. And we have always honored a just cause eviction policy. Our projects pencil, and we are able to offer these reasonable protections for our tenants.

SB 608 asks landlords to play a small role in addressing our housing crisis. We need many more solutions and many more partners, but SB 608 offers an important step in the right direction – providing basic protections to renters across Oregon. On behalf of WNHS and NEDCO, I urge you to vote yes on SB 608.

Thank you for all of the work you do to make Oregon a better place to live.

Sincerely,

Brigetta Olson

Chief Operating Officer