

Building Trust and Deepening Relationships from 3,000 Miles Away

Oregon Housing and Community Services

Legislative Advocacy: Federal Advocacy

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BUILDING TRUST AND DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS FROM 3,000 MILES AWAY

Advancing the overall mission of Oregon Housing and Community Services

Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) provides resources to increase access to safe, stable, and affordable housing so that Oregonians can live a life free from poverty. The agency is unique in that it is both a housing finance agency and administers programs serving Oregonians across the housing continuum, including preventing homelessness, providing housing stability support, financing the building and preservation of affordable housing, and supporting homeownership opportunities. Due to the broad role of OHCS, the agency relies on close collaboration and partnership at all levels of government, including our federal delegation.

Oregon's congressional delegation consists of Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Congressmembers Suzanne Bonamici, Cliff Bentz, Earl Blumenauer, Val Hoyle, Lori Chavez-DeRemer, and Andrea Salinas. Historically, OHCS hasn't always prioritized the time for close collaboration with our federal delegation. In recent years, we've seen the value of tearing down silos and intentionally working to increase partnerships to advance our shared goals of increasing housing opportunities for Oregonians. Over the past year, we have worked closely with the federal delegation with monthly briefings. These meetings provide time to collaborate and communicate about affordable housing challenges such as reducing the PAB threshold to access 4% LIHTC resources, increasing flexibility around policies that address West Coast housing challenges (such as waivers for Emergency Solution Grants), and keeping them informed of state legislation and program updates along with the opportunity to brainstorm opportunities for future collaboration.

FEDERAL ADVOCACY FOR MORE PRIVATE ACTIVITY BOND FLEXIBILITY AND USAGE

Employing analytical skills to anticipate and identify potential ramifications of issues

In 2015, recognizing the need for more development of affordable housing, the Oregon Legislature established the Local Innovation Fast Track (LIFT) program to help more communities, especially rural communities, develop affordable housing. As a result, LIFT allowed many rural communities to leverage funding for affordable housing development, specifically pairing with PAB and LIHTC resources. The success of the program, and local voter approved housing bonds, has caused Oregon to reach its PAB volume cap in the last couple of years, making it much harder to finance affordable housing developments for 2023-24 that need PABs to finance their projects as the pipeline has reached its capacity.

Innovation through coalition building

Recognizing the need for more PAB flexibility, OHCS organized a coalition of housing agencies and funders in 2022 to strategize and mobilize Oregon's delegation. Outreach began through one-on-one conversations with delegation staff. As a result of this outreach and the ongoing support of NCSHA, OHCS Director Andrea Bell was invited by Senator Wyden to testify before

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the Senate Finance Committee on “The Role of Tax Incentives in Affordable Housing.” Through this testimony, OHCS laid out the current seriousness of the situation, not only experienced in Oregon but throughout the country, and advocate for reducing the bond financing threshold, or 50% test, and raising the bond cap.

This testimony helped energize the coalition of 22 affordable housing partners here in Oregon to organize a letter sent to the federal delegation on Sept. 9, 2022. The members of the delegation responded by sending a letter to the Speaker of the House and Minority Leader around this important issue on Nov. 17, 2022. Through years of coalition building throughout the state with partners and the federal delegation, OHCS stepped in as the voice and expert in affordable housing to advocate for issues around housing policies such as PABs at a federal level.

CONSISTENT COLLABORATION WITH FEDERAL DELEGATION

Forging relationships through consistency and replicability

Although simple, one of the most replicable methods for relationship building with the federal delegation and their staff is hosting monthly meetings. These monthly meetings are between the OHCS Government Relations team and federal delegation staff. State legislative, program, and wildfire recovery updates are regularly shared during these meetings. Federal delegation staff also share updates from the federal level or can ask OHCS staff questions. Through these consistent monthly meetings, OHCS builds relationships and serves an expert resource on issues around affordable housing for the federal delegation. These relationships are solidified during NCSHA’s LegCon during meetings with members of Congress and during the happy hour social gathering hosted jointly by OHCS, Senator Merkley’s staff and Congressman Blumenauer’s staff.

Providing benefits that outweigh the costs and demonstrating effective use of resources

Although monthly meetings take time to prepare for and attend, the benefits outweigh the costs. This space is a time people can rely on every month to collaborate and share information. Through this avenue, OHCS has kept the federal delegation apprised of the 2023 Legislative Session where Governor Tina Kotek has declared housing and homelessness as one of her top priorities. With a proposed investment of over \$1 billion and passage of House Bills 2001 and 5019, the federal delegation can tangibly see Oregon’s commitment to addressing the housing crisis. In addition, monthly updates around how federal monies are used throughout Oregon help demonstrate effective use of resources and builds trust with the federal delegation. For example, OHCS provides regular updates on the Homeowner Assistance Fund and wildfire recovery CDBG-DR funds. Most recently, HUD allocated \$5.4 million to help Oregon produce affordable housing, \$2.4 million higher than the \$3 million minimum. It’s solidified OHCS as the leaders of housing policy in Oregon, and OHCS is a key partner in onboarding new legislative housing staffers for Oregon’s delegation.

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OHCS SEEN AS AFFORDABLE HOUSING EXPERTS

Achieving strategic objectives and anticipating, identifying, and prioritizing legislative issues

OHCS spent time in person with members of the federal delegation at the 2023 NCSHA Legislative Conference. OHCS gave input on several key questions from Senator Merkley's office on the West Coast Housing Emergency Declaration. This included evaluating existing coordination requirements for recipients of HUD-funded housing and homelessness programs to increase coordination, eliminating barriers to Section 811 access, continuing COVID-specific flexibilities around affordable housing, and reframing HOME-ARP as HUD's flagship production program. These recommendations align the agency and federal strategic objectives to reduce barriers for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing stable housing, expedite establishment of non-congregate shelter facilities, move households into rental units quickly, and prevent households from becoming homeless due to eviction proceedings. Through close collaboration throughout the year, OHCS had a clear view of federal strategic objectives and made the recommendations listed above around legislative issues.

LIFTING VOICES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE

Reaching target audiences

One of the target audiences for any HFA is the people and families that live in the homes that HFAs help fund. In any legislative process, the voice of the people and those of lived experience should be at the forefront and at the table. In October 2022, OHCS hosted a coffee conversation with residents at Rockwood Village, an affordable housing complex with 224 homes in Gresham, OR. OHCS Director Andrea Bell, Senator Merkley, state legislators, developers, and community partners attended this event to hear from residents about their experience and tour Rockwood Village. The event included coffee, Hispanic baked goods, and moving conversation between the residents and the senator. By creating these types of events, the federal delegation can directly hear from the individuals and families living in affordable housing and see the impact of housing policy.

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Visual Aids



OHCS Director Andrea Bell testifying to the Senate Finance Committee on “The Role of Tax Incentives in Affordable Housing”. [Full testimony link.](#)








OHCS Director Andrea Bell and Senator Ron Wyden presenting at the NCSHA Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

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Senator Jeff Merkley, OHCS staff, state legislators and partners hear from Rockwood Village residents.
[Media story](#)

<h3>February 2023 Federal Updates</h3> 	<h3>Top Federal Priorities for 2023</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reintroduction of the Affordable Housing Tax Credit Improvement Act – March estimate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Low Income Housing Tax Credit investments • Increase Private Activity Bond (PAB) allocation • Reduce PAB 50% test to 25% • Need for additional Emergency Solution Grants and other homelessness resources <p>SAVE THE DATE: OHCS in DC March 27-29 (NCSHA Leg Con)</p> 
<h3>Program Updates</h3> <p>Andrea Bell (she/her) Executive Director</p> 	<h3>Homeownership Assistance Fund Update</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HAF program is currently <u>paused</u>. • OHCS will announce details about reopening next week. • Homeowners who have received a foreclosure sale notice are still able to apply through housing counselors. • Homeowners in this situation should not delay in finding a housing counselor 
<h3>CDBG – Disaster Recovery</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We received a signed executed grants agreement from HUD on February 4th. • Positive indicators on Low-Moderate-Income waiver request to use statewide AMLI instead of county-by-county • HARP (Homeowner Replacement Program) roll out targeting March 	<h3>Governor Tina Kotek Housing Priorities</h3> <p>Taylor Smiley Wolfe (she/they) Governor's Housing and Homelessness Initiative Director</p> 
<h3>Emergency Orders</h3> <p>On her first full day of office, Governor Kotek issued three Executive Order (EO) related to Oregon's housing crisis:</p> 	<h3>Mission Focused Recommended Budget</h3> <p>GOV. KO MAYOR: BROWN</p> <p>Governor Tina Kotek unveiled her budget recommendations for the 2023-25</p> 

OHCS uses a standard report out for federal priorities, program updates, and a deep dive topic (sometimes with special guests) during the monthly meeting, an example from February is shown here where the Governor's Housing and Homelessness Initiative Director was our special guest.