



Lisa Joyce
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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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OHCS Partners testified before Joint Ways and Means Committee

A number of partners testified before the Joint Ways and Means Committee yesterday on behalf of Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS).

“We feel very well served by the department,” said **John Mullin**, co-chair of the Human Services Coalition of Oregon.

Mullin was not alone in urging committee members to continue to fund OHCS’s efforts to provide affordable housing and other services to low-income Oregonians.

“I’m proud to lend my voice to those supporting the work of OHCS,” said **Jeana Woolley**, member of the state Housing Council.

Woolley cited a drop in affordable housing financing, primarily due to lack of bond sales and purchase of tax credits, as a reason behind the Council working with a “sharp pencil.” She said despite housing financing woes in Oregon and in the nation, OHCS is staying true to its mission to provide affordable housing, and helping Oregonians to become self-sufficient and achieve prosperity.

“The federal stimulus money will provide some help, but it is a dedicated partnership throughout Oregon that will get the job done,” she told committee members.

Bruce Goldberg, director of the Department of Human Services, confirmed Woolley’s stance, saying, “It’s not about agencies. It’s about the people in Oregon. We hope you will do what’s needed to develop the kind of housing we need in this state. If you don’t we will see a ripple effect in what we do as an agency.”

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Goldberg cited a 25 percent increase over last year in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to the “poorest of the poor” in Oregon.

“We’ve had several disasters in Oregon – flooding in Vernonia, the growing economic disaster – that shows us the need for a really strong safety net,” he said. “We need to help families form a bridge from where they are ... affordable housing is the key.”

Alicia Hansen, a Community Action client whose family receives assistance through a state program, told committee members, “Stable housing is our biggest challenge and critical to our family’s well-being.”

Hansen is the sole provider for her critically ill husband and their children. Following a series of hardships, the couple was forced to file bankruptcy and now depends on state assistance. The family is on the list for Section 8 housing, which could take up to five years to get. And Hansen’s husband is in the third round of appeals, two years in the making, for a Social Security disability claim, and is running out of options, she said.

“We’re aware we probably won’t have the life we once had, but we hope to regain some stability for the well-being of our family,” **Hansen** told the committee. “Without OHCS, we would be living in our car.”

Needs are “huge and growing,” said **Janet Byrd** with the Housing Alliance Coalition and the Neighborhood Partnership Fund. “With unemployment in the state shifting, more people are needing help from the system.”

Those giving testimony urged Ways and Means to pass a “functioning budget” for the department.

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Oregon Housing and Community Services

What We Do Matters!



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In other action:

- **SB 200:** Establishes state policy regarding homelessness had a hearing Friday morning before a receptive House Committee on Human Services.

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