

Housing issues draw spotlight in next legislative session

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CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

The Housing Alliance brings together advocates, local governments, housing authorities, community development corporations, environmentalists, service providers, business interests and all others dedicated to increasing the resources available to meet our housing needs to support a common statewide legislative and policy agenda. Alison McIntosh is a policy manager with Neighborhood Partnerships.

In a few weeks, the Oregon Legislature will convene for the 2013 Legislative Session. The Housing Alliance and our members see an Oregon where everyone has the safety, security and opportunity that having a stable home provides. We know that having a home that's affordable and stable means parents and adults can work and help provide for their families and kids can succeed in school. It means that our seniors can live with dignity and grow older in the communities they helped to build, and it means our veterans can find stability after serving our country.

We also know that today, this vision is just a dream for too many Oregonians. Too many of our families and neighbors have to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table or buying medicine. Too many of our neighbors don't have the security and stability that home provides, and too many of our veterans sleep in doorways.

The Housing Alliance and its members are hard at work to make our vision of an Oregon where everyone has a safe place to call home a reality. Our 2013 Housing Opportunity Agenda is wide ranging and ambitious, and we know it will help make sure more Oregonians have a place to call home. Here are three of our local efforts this legislative session.

First, we are committed to ensuring that there are funds to help prevent or end homelessness. We have two successful and effective approaches — the Emergency Housing Account and the State Homeless Assistance Program — that provide funding across the state. Using existing networks of partners in our communities, they are the first line against homelessness. These funds help people stay in their homes with emergency rent assistance; they help people return home through assistance with application fees, deposits, and a few months of help paying the rent; and they provide emergency shelter for people seeking safety from a violent situation. These programs have been cut the past few years as a result of the recession's impact on

the state budget, in spite of growing need. The Housing Alliance wants to see this funding restored to help end or prevent homelessness across the state.

Next, we're working with the Speaker of the House, Rep. Tina Kotek, on her effort to ensure that tenants with Section 8 vouchers can find a place to call home. There are a wide range of partners helping to craft an approach that will make vouchers easier to use for both landlords and tenants. Section 8 vouchers, which provide rent assistance for thousands of Oregonians with very low incomes, are an essential tool to keep our neighbors in housing. We need all of our tools to work as intended.

And finally, we're making sure we honor our commitments to our veterans. Too many Oregonians have served their Country, prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, and have then come home only to find they can't get work or find a stable place to call home. There are many efforts at the federal level to provide additional vouchers and end veteran homelessness by 2015. We know we can end homelessness among veterans, and small amounts of additional state resources

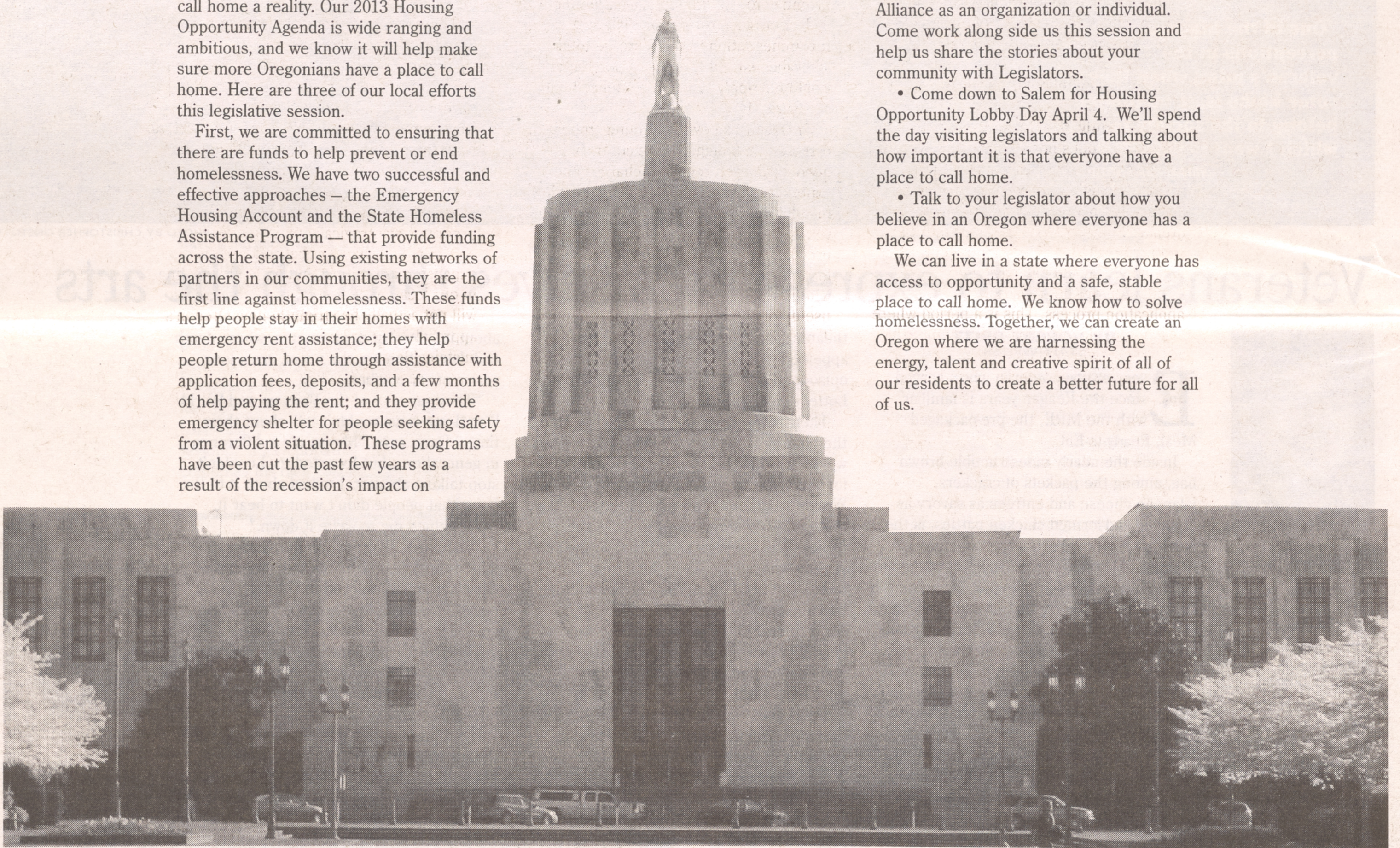
will help us accomplish this goal.

Our request is simple — we want to increase the existing document recording fee which funds affordable housing by \$5 per document to honor our commitment to veterans. These funds will help us remove barriers that veterans face in three areas. First, to prevent or end homelessness for veterans through emergency rent assistance, we need to be able to offer help with application fees or help with moving into a new apartment. Second, we need to build housing specifically for veterans who need a little bit of extra support; and we need to be able to remove barriers by helping with down payment assistance for veterans who are ready to buy a home. We need to honor our commitment to veterans by helping to make sure they all have a place to call home.

We have a lot we're asking of our State Legislature, and we need your help to accomplish our goals. We'll need all of us and our partners and people that know how important housing is to lend their voices and their time. So we're asking you to get involved in a few ways:

- Join us. Consider joining the Housing Alliance as an organization or individual. Come work along side us this session and help us share the stories about your community with Legislators.
- Come down to Salem for Housing Opportunity Lobby Day April 4. We'll spend the day visiting legislators and talking about how important it is that everyone have a place to call home.
- Talk to your legislator about how you believe in an Oregon where everyone has a place to call home.

We can live in a state where everyone has access to opportunity and a safe, stable place to call home. We know how to solve homelessness. Together, we can create an Oregon where we are harnessing the energy, talent and creative spirit of all of our residents to create a better future for all of us.





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