

Veterans, families, renters make gains in legislative session

Oregon lawmakers end session with funding victories and in the fight against housing discrimination

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, a member of The Housing Alliance.

BY ALISON MCINTOSH
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

In the several months prior to every Oregon legislative session, housing advocates come together under the umbrella of the Oregon Housing Alliance to set goals and put together proposals for consideration by our Legislature in the coming session. All of our work is in hope of being able to increase opportunity for Oregonians by making sure more of our neighbors, seniors, families, and people with disabilities have a safe, stable place to call home. We know that for people to access opportunity and to succeed, they need a place to call home.

The 2013 Legislative Session adjourned on Monday, July 8, and housing advocates have a lot to celebrate. We know that as a state, we are all better off when everyone has a safe, stable place to call home. And together, we shared that vision with legislators. We told stories about the need for more affordable housing in our communities. We educated new legislators about the importance of housing and put forward a wide range of proposals to address needs across our state — from preventing and ending homelessness to keeping seniors and people with disabilities in their apartments to helping people with Section 8 vouchers live in their preferred communities.

We came together in April for a Housing Opportunity Day and filled the Capitol. More than 150 of us met with over two-thirds of the Legislature that day, and shared our priorities and asked for help from legislators. We called and wrote letters to our legislators throughout the session. We came to testify and share our stories. And we won some amazing victories.

Together, we helped pass an increase to the document recording fee to help make

sure veterans have a safe, stable place to call home. HB 2417 will raise nearly \$6 million in the next two years, and that money will go toward preventing and ending homelessness, offering short and long term rent assistance, developing affordable housing with services, and increasing homeownership for veterans. This money will help make sure more of Oregon's veterans have the opportunity that having a home provides.

With the leadership of House Speaker Tina Kotek, we helped pass a law that says that landlords can no longer refuse to accept the application of someone with a Section 8 voucher simply because they have a voucher. When the law goes into effect, tenants with Section 8 vouchers will have the opportunity to be considered for apartments just like everyone else. The bill will also help landlords by making the program easier to use. If a tenant does damage a unit and can't pay, there is a fund set up to help landlords recover those costs up to \$5,000. This was a huge and exciting victory and we know this will have a significant impact on people who have or may get Section 8 vouchers in the future.

We were also able to secure \$5 million to preserve existing affordable housing; to extend a few key tax credits — one which help build housing for agricultural workers and their families and two that help preserve manufactured home parks as affordable housing; to extend a tool which helps make homeownership affordable in the City of Portland; and to restore seniors and people with disabilities to the state's property tax deferral program. We also were able to help extend the state's Earned Income Tax Credit, which helps working folks and families with low incomes make ends meet.

We know there is more to do. There are

things that were left unfinished this session, there are challenges that continue to face communities across our state, and there are things on the horizon we must face together. Things that were left unfinished include funding for emergency rent assistance through the Emergency Housing Account and State Homeless Assistance Program. We were not able to secure additional resources for these programs despite the huge need for preventing and ending homelessness across the state. In the coming months, we'll be asking for your help as we work to share this important story with legislators.

There is also much to be done for safety-net services and basic supports for folks across the state. There are too many families in need of temporary assistance who can't get the services or help they need. While the Legislature added an additional \$5 million to create pathways to employment for families receiving temporary assistance, we will still only be able to provide one out of every five families with services that might help them remove barriers and return to work. Disabled adults who are waiting for federal disability benefits have nowhere to turn, and the Legislature did not move forward a proposal to study General Assistance this session.

We know how to solve these problems. We can make sure everyone has a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home. We know that together, we can tell a story about communities where everyone has a place to call home and the opportunity that it provides. We know that together, we can change our state and our communities for the better. And there is no better time to start in on this work than right now — so join us. Help us tell the story of what housing means in our communities.

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New column to address disability issues among the disadvantaged

BY GRACE GROWING MEDICINE REED
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Disability issues can be, and often are, linked to homelessness, the poor, mentally ill, elderly, at-risk youths and addicted peoples. Marginalized people



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are having a hard time of it these days with sequestration, budget cuts, lack of medical insurance, lack of housing, etc. When dysfunctional applications of poverty, disability, economic and political issues are pushed together, there is a setup of the perfect storm that many are (and will be) suffering and dying from. This is not the best boat to be on with its many holes.

So if you look at these problems linked with the community itself, you can see that the Portland community, including outlying areas, are broken, disabled, poor and in need of healing. If a whole society is marginalized, then problems are not going

to be solved, solutions are going to be a long time coming and we all suffer from the disease and conflict of what can be a certain apathy response. Apathy seems to be the go-to when people freeze out of not knowing what to do or what can be done. My hope is that we continue to address these and other problems looking at the many sides of the challenges ahead.

On June 24, I had the pleasure of interviewing Streets Roots Executive Director Israel Bayer on KBOO's Disability Awareness show. We talked about the growing homelessness in the suburbs, perceptions of poverty in the general community, the nobility of the disabled (and able bodied) who work with Street Roots. And we offered some insights and possible solutions to attitudes and actions around these issues.

Disability Awareness is a new column and a new show on KBOO, and I look forward to speaking to and exploring the many facets of the awareness that are present and possible in our and other communities as well as national projects and efforts. It is time to rebuild the boat we are all in or at least find a way to repair it. The water is deep and choppy just now, so get those tools out and let's get to building some security.

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