



House Speaker Tina Kotek addresses a Jan. 9 forum of Portland residents, advocates and lawmakers about the state's housing crisis.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WELCOME HOME COALITION

State measures essential to ending housing crisis

It's not just Portland experiencing a housing crisis. Many communities throughout Oregon are facing a severe affordable housing shortage. Add this to rising rents and stagnate wages and thousands of Oregonians across the state, in Bend, Eugene, Hood River and beyond, are finding themselves scrambling for a safe place to call home.

Housing advocates, including Street Roots, have been calling on the Oregon Legislature to act in a meaningful way for years.

Local governments, including the city of Portland, and the Oregon Housing Alliance are advocating for a menu of important revenue options and regulations to give hardworking Oregonians a fighting chance.

This year, both Portland and Eugene have led the way by declaring a homeless emergency and working to increase both revenue and regulations to support people having access to housing.

Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer and House Speaker Tina Kotek, both Democrats representing North and Northeast Portland, are leading the charge with a multi-tiered proposal that lawmakers throughout the state need to support.

The legislators are asking for \$10 million in emergency rent assistance, because the best way to prevent displacement and homelessness is by preventing an eviction in the first place. Emergency rent assistance bridges the gaps, helping people weather a tough financial stretch and rebound. And it is proven to work. According to Home Forward, the local housing authority, the vast majority of families who receive rent assistance remain in their homes long after the assistance ends.

The Legislature is also proposing \$17.5 million to preserve affordable housing with lottery backed bonds and \$5 million to support housing programs by raising the

state's document recording fee. These are ongoing revenue streams that are vital to keeping our state from falling further behind.

Advocates and legislators are also hoping to pass important regulations on eviction prevention and lifting the ban on inclusionary housing, which would create a clear path for local governments to require housing developments to include affordable housing. Oregon is one of only two states, along with Texas, where lobbyists succeeded in pushing through a ban on inclusionary zoning, thereby preempting local authority. That was just 16 years ago. Today, we have shortage of more than 30,000 affordable units in Portland alone, according to the city's figures. This prohibition has to go if Portland or any other community in Oregon is expected to get ahead of this crisis.

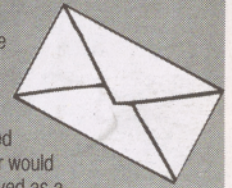
All of this isn't close to being enough to actually tackle Oregon's affordable housing crisis. But it's a start and anything less would be an insult to Oregonians.

Gov. Kate Brown should begin working with legislators throughout the state to craft a path forward to standardize investments in affordable housing the same way we invest in the environment, transportation and education. Because without stable, affordable housing, families are financially and personally vulnerable to failure. And according to the U.S. Census Bureau, one in two renters in Oregon - half of all renters - is already cost burdened from a combination of high rents and low wages. Without significant action at the state level, it is only going to get worse.

In order to have a healthy Oregon, affordable housing has to remain a top-tier priority. It can be fostered and restored alongside a healthy and vibrant private marketplace for housing statewide. These measures are a positive step forward for all folks in the community. Let your lawmaker know you support a healthy housing environment for everyone.

Write in

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