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Affordable housing bill passes Oregon Senate

SB 1582 implements \$40 million investment in housing for low-income families

SALEM – Oregon Senate Democrats today passed a bill to increase the stock of affordable housing for low-income households, particularly those in rural and historically underserved communities.

Senate Bill 1582 – a priority affordable housing measure of Gov. Kate Brown and Senate Democrats – passed by a 21-7 vote on the Senate floor. The bill implements the Local Innovation and Fast Track (LIFT) Housing program, developed by the Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) Department, with direction from the Oregon Housing Stability Council. The LIFT program is intended to increase affordable housing availability statewide for low-income Oregonians and their families.

“This bill is intended to create the program that will create and provide affordable housing for low-income families around the state,” said Rod Monroe (D-Portland), who carried the bill. “Housing costs have reached crisis levels in this state. The most basic factor that has a huge impact on a person’s health, wellbeing and safety is stable housing. This will help make that available for more people who need it.”

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature authorized \$40 million in general obligation bonds to fund affordable housing development projects statewide, but did not establish program parameters. With bonds scheduled to be issued in the spring of 2017, Senate Bill 1582 sets forth clear guidelines to ensure that bonding dollars are invested wisely.

SB 1582 establishes a framework for the use and allocation of funds approved in 2015. The measure specifies how OHCS will comply with the requirement of general obligation bonds, to operate or have ownership interest in development projects. The bill also outlines program goals and project selection standards including priorities to contain costs, maximize the number of units created and protect units for long-term affordability. The program places specific emphasis on reaching historically underserved communities — including communities of color and rural communities — and on working in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS), to reach participants in DHS programs.

Housing stability is the lynchpin to individual and family stability overall. Addressing the increasingly urgent need for affordable housing statewide is the goal of this legislation. SB 1582 will help ensure that the significant investment made by the Legislature in 2015 is spent wisely and thoughtfully to meet the housing needs of Oregonians across the state.

SB 1582 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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