

Director's Message



February 2, 2015

To our partners:

This week marks the beginning of the 2015 Legislative Session. As it has been for several years, this will be an important Legislative session for affordable housing. Governor Kitzhaber has proposed a historic investment in affordable housing - \$100 million in bonding capacity to build affordable housing for families with children experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This is an exciting moment to have a Governor who understands how critical housing is to achieving other state goals – stable families, kids reading at grade level, healthy people – and more.

As we begin this session, we have several priorities we will be working on. They include:

- **Updating our governance structure.** During our transition process and our engagement with stakeholders, together we determined that the agency had many, diffuse governing bodies which each oversaw their own areas of expertise. We have a bill this session (HB 2442) that seeks to move towards a more streamlined governance system, and gives more responsibility to the State Housing Council. The Housing Council will also be renamed in HB 2442 to the Oregon Housing Stability Council. This attempts to underscore the role our diversity of programs play – we provide funds both to build affordable housing and to stabilize Oregonians either with rent assistance dollars, energy assistance, or weatherization, and more.
- **Updating some eligibility criteria language.** Through the scenario build process with internal staff and external partners, we found instances of program eligibility criteria being slightly different for similar programs. SB 244 seeks to align these criteria to help program staff ensure our programs are simple to administer and use for our partners.
- **Renewing the Oregon IDA Initiative and the funding mechanism.** Since the program's inception, OHCS has been the agency responsible for overseeing the Oregon Individual Development Account Initiative and tax credit, while day to day management has been done through Neighborhood Partnerships. As with all state tax credits, the funding mechanism for this program is up for review and renewal by the Legislature. Our bill, HB 2441, seeks to renew the program and funding mechanism and also includes language to expand the purposes that Oregonians with low incomes can save for through the Initiative.

As always, we will be presenting to the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Transportation & Economic Development, which has authority over our budget. We're looking forward to sharing the progress we have made as an agency over the past year since we last met with them.

We expect the proposal in the Governor's Budget for \$100 million in bonds will be taken up by the Ways & Means Capital Construction Subcommittee. As we move through the Legislative session, we will work diligently to answer questions and talk with Legislators and stakeholders.



The agency also has a relatively new Legislative Team. Rem Nivens, Assistant Director for Public Affairs will lead the effort, supported by Alison McIntosh, Government Relations and Communications Liaison, (alison.mcintosh@oregon.gov) as well as Mike Boyer, Legislative Coordinator (mike.boyer@oregon.gov). Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to any of them at any time.

I, along with the State Housing Council and the Executive Team, are excited by the potential this session holds for this agency, and welcome the conversations with the Legislative branch we are embarking on today.

Sincerely,



Margaret S. Van Vliet
Director, Oregon Housing and Community Services Department

