

Director's Message



Oregon Housing and Community Services

June 8, 2020

Dear Partners,

I hope this message finds you well.

First, if you haven't already please take a moment to read the [Special Director's Message](#) sent out last week. Our thoughts are with George Floyd's family, community and all those impacted by anti-Black assaults at the hands of police. OHCS affirms our support for Black, Brown and Indigenous people in OHCS and in the diverse communities we serve. We join our partners in expressing collective anguish and a renewed commitment to equity and racial justice.



June is National Homeownership month. I'm deeply appreciative of homeownership centers and community partners providing forbearance and foreclosure assistance alongside countless organizations working to expand housing options to keep the dream of homeownership alive.

June kicks off 50 years of Pride Month. It's important to pause to recognize Pride's roots stemming from protests outside the Stonewall Inn led by Black transgender women. This month, many Pride celebrations worldwide are protesting systemic racism as part of Pride's legacy in protesting inequalities. OHCS joins together in struggle and celebration with the LGBTQ+ community and honors those who have fought for LGBTQ+ rights throughout history.

June commemorates Juneteenth – combining the words June and nineteenth known to some as "Freedom Day." It is the oldest known US celebration of the end of slavery. Juneteenth is a day to celebrate freedom and equality and to pay tribute to the work still left undone to end racial discrimination in America.





OHCS joins in celebration of the abolishment of slavery and recommits to the work ahead in dismantling white supremacy and racism.

COVID-19 Response

The [Governor's Office](#) announced a \$30 million investment to protect essential agricultural workers and secure Oregon's food supply chain. The Governor's Office worked alongside OHCS, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, farmworker advocates, and farmers to develop a funding proposal to deploy rapid support and resources to Oregon's agricultural producers to meet harvest demands and to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Find out more at the [Food Security and Farmworker Safety Project](#) website.



OHCS has directed \$3.5 million of Joint Emergency Board funding for safe shelter alternatives for vulnerable populations including people experiencing homelessness and agricultural workers. We are working in partnership with the Oregon Human Development Corporation to ensure these funds meet the needs of agricultural workers and their families, and vulnerable populations.

Finally, OHCS is chairing the [COVID-19 Statewide Homeless Populations Task Force](#) to provide a statewide platform for strategizing, information sharing, and collaboration, guidance and resource attainment. Continue to visit the [OHCS COVID webpage](#) for more information and email hcs_housinginfo@oregon.gov with any COVID questions.

COVID Rent Relief Program





In April the Oregon Legislature provide \$8.5 million in rental assistance during a Joint Emergency Board meeting. The funding was distributed to Community Action Agencies across Oregon targeting Oregonians impacted by COVID. [Click here to learn how to access these resources.](#)

Additional Emergency Board Allocations: More Resources for Oregonians

Great news – on Friday, the Oregon Legislature's Joint Emergency Board allocated \$95 million to OHCS! The details will be forthcoming as these funds become available. The resources come for the CARES Act, specifically Oregon's Coronavirus Relief Funds, and will create/expand three programs:

- [Rental Assistance](#) – \$55 million in rental assistance to be provided through Community Action Agencies. These resources will augment the COVID Rent Relief Program established by April Emergency Board allocations.
- [Energy Assistance](#) – \$15 million in utility assistance to be provided through Community Action Agencies. While many utilities have temporary, voluntary shutoff moratoriums in place, many Oregonians are behind on utility bills and in need of assistance.
- [Affordable Housing Provider Stability](#) – \$20 million to provide operating loans to affordable housing providers. Without these resources, there is a risk that publicly supported housing will not be able to meet operating resource needs, which could lead to increase deferred maintenance, default, and potentially foreclosure.

We are eager to get these resources into the hands of our partners and Oregonians. Check OHCS social media for updates. If you need to find what assistance is available now; please **call 211** or visit 211.org

Exciting OHCS Staffing Updates

Last month, Ryan Vogt began work at the Oregon Employment Department. With more than 20 years in supervisory and management experience, his work at multiple agencies will be invaluable in navigating changing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our friends at the Employment Department will benefit from Ryan's expertise

Exciting news: Caleb Yant will be moving from his role as Chief Financial Officer into a new role for OHCS, Deputy Director. For the past seven years, Caleb has proved invaluable in providing essential fiscal oversight to OHCS while ensuring accountability and stewardship of finite resources. He brings a blend of data analysis, creativity and warmth to his leadership. His sound expertise in finance and budgeting decisions ensure our grants, monitoring and procurement processes are running smoothly. His willingness to continue this vital work in a new





capacity will ensure stability for our agency. As Caleb transitions, the Executive Team will work to backfill Caleb's current role as CFO.

Exciting news: Tricia Tillman has accepted the permanent position of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer at OHCS. Tricia served as a Housing Stability Council Member prior to joining the OHCS staff as Interim Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Tricia has over 25 years of experience working in the equity in health, human services, environmental justice and housing fields in 3 states. She has established transformative, culturally-specific programs and equity-focused offices at the state and county level. She brings a calm, deliberate and outcome-oriented approach that will help us advance our focus on equity and racial justice in this time of rapid change and great uncertainty. We are fortunate to have Tricia guiding this work in fostering systemic and institutional transformation.

Staff Appreciation

OHCS is an organization with a deep abundance of talent. A great deal of the work advancing our people-centered mission happens behind the scenes. Last month we celebrated the service of five staff during National Public Service Week, the annual celebration of civil servants who dedicate their careers to making a difference. I want to take this opportunity to personally thank and recognize the following employees for their contribution to advancing the work of OHCS:

- Sam Aryal - Information Technology
- Christopher Henderson - Human Resources
- Alycia Howell - Homeownership
- Sam Kenney - Housing Stabilization Division
- Rick Ruzicka - Affordable Rental Housing

Oregon Legislative Updates

May Legislative Days

In May legislators typically gather in Salem to hear updates from agencies, advocates, and Oregonians on implementation of legislative investments and ongoing needs. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, these meetings were held virtually. OHCS was invited to present to three legislative committees:

- [House Committee on Housing](#) – Myself and Director Andrea Bell [presented](#) on the vast housing needs in light of COVID-19, from homelessness resources to renter and affordable housing providers resources to homeowner support.





- [House Committee on Energy and Environment](#) – Director Andrea Bell [provided brief testimony](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on OHCS energy assistance programs and the additional need for energy assistance.
- [Senate Committee on Housing and Development](#) – Myself and Director Andrea Bell briefly [presented](#) on the vast housing needs of Oregonians in light of COVID-19.

2021 Legislative Agenda Planning Update (Revenue Forecast and Stakeholder Feedback)

OHCS began planning for the 2021 Legislative Session in earnest at the beginning of 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic crisis required agency leadership to retool the 2021 DRAFT Legislative Agenda. OHCS hosted webinars and conducted a stakeholder survey to receive feedback on that draft agenda, [visit the Legislative Updates website](#) to watch the webinars and read materials.

OHCS anticipated that the May Revenue Forecast and results from the stakeholder survey would impact the requested investments and legislative concepts detailed in our agenda. Stakeholders were clear: OHCS should not give up on gains in homeownership resources. Other [key takeaways from the survey](#) are available online. Additionally, OHCS anticipated significant decreases in state revenue. This was confirmed by state economists last month. While Oregon's General Funds and Lottery Funds will be greatly constrained, bonding investments remain advantageous.

There are some key changes to the draft agenda that was introduced last month. OHCS has added the items that were previously “on the bubble” into the agenda; OHCS will request \$5 million for homeownership development, \$2.5 million to decommission and replace older manufactured homes, and \$3.5 million for acquisition/preservation bridge loans for manufactured home parks. Additionally, due to an additional \$20 million in federal resources, OHCS is reducing the request for energy assistance from \$15 million to \$10 million.

Additional information will be shared via email to those that have subscribed to receive updates. [Add your email to the Legislative Updates list](#) to ensure you are up-to-date on OHCS' 2021 DRAFT Legislative Agenda.

Affordable Rental Housing Update **Rent Increase Policy**

The Affordable Rental Housing Division presented an update to the Rent Increase Policy to the Housing Stability Council at the June 5, 2020 meeting. The policy is





applicable to most affordable housing developments utilizing primary development funds from OHCS. The purpose of the policy is two-fold:

1. To ensure that tenants in OHCS rent regulated affordable rental housing projects are protected from extreme increases to rents.
2. To provide affordable rental housing owners with a predictable, clear path forward for requesting and implementing rent increases, within applicable program limits, necessary to sustain the ongoing operations of their affordable housing projects.



Read the [Council packet](#) for additional information on updates to the policy. Please contact Rick Ruzicka, rick.ruzicka@oregon.gov (503) 986-6824.

Developer and Rent Collection Survey Results

OHCS released surveys to our partners to help us understand the impact of the COVID pandemic and economic crisis on affordable housing developers and providers. The questions for developers covered the impact of COVID-19 on current and anticipated development. We also asked about the impact on rent collections. While rent collections in affordable properties are stronger than in many market-rate rental properties across the country, we are still seeing continued rent non-payments in our affordable housing portfolio. This May data, reflecting nearly half of the homes in our portfolio, shows that approximately 11.6% of rent has not been paid on time though some recovery has been made through late payments; this is consistent with national trends. We will continue to monitor rent collections monthly and are eager to implement new resources that will ensure the long-term viability of this portfolio of critical affordable rental housing.





You can find the [Developer](#) and [Rent](#) survey results, along with flyers about Tenant Rights during COVID-19, under the Affordable Rental Housing header on our agency [COVID-19 response webpage](#).

Recent Funding Awards

On Friday, the Housing Stability Council approved Pass-Through Revenue Bonds for three awards for affordable housing construction and rehabilitation projects, resulting in the preservation or creation of 216 affordable homes. These awards include Pattons Homes in Northeast Portland, Tigard Triangle and the Springtree Apartments near Gresham.

The Cedar Commons groundbreaking was a wonderful virtual event that I was so happy to be a part of. This project is bringing 60 homes to those of our neighbors that are currently experiencing homelessness or at risk in Southeastern Portland. We are very excited to see this project's grand opening is just about one year.



Housing Stabilization Update

Introducing New Assistant Directors of Homeless Services

Laura Lien, Homeless Services Assistant Director. Laura joins OHCS from the Department of Education where she collaborated on strategic planning and equity-focused initiatives. Laura attended graduate school for Housing Studies where she sharpened her passion for access, use and placemaking. We are thrilled to have Laura's leadership join us at such a critical juncture in which our programs and services are needed, unlike ever before.

Mike Savara, Homeless Services Assistant Director. Mike comes to OHCS from Central City Concern as Dual Diagnosis Program Manager. He brings extensive experience around permanent supportive housing and has worked in a variety of direct service roles supporting people experiencing homelessness for the last 11 years. We feel lucky to have his leadership join the OHCS family during this time critical time when his extensive expertise around housing stability and direct outreach is invaluable.





Homeownership Update

Foreclosure Counseling Dollars

In response to our monthly COVID-19 calls with partners, OHCS directed \$500,000 in HOPE funding to 15 Homeownership Centers to provide COVID specific homeowner counseling and assistance. The Homeownership Division awarded the funding to current Homeownership Center Grantees to assist clients needing assistance with understanding the forbearance process including understanding the steps to take once the forbearance period is over.

Upcoming Engagement Opportunities

- **Statewide Communication Network COVID-19 (Public Affairs Division)** – June 17th and July 1st at 2 PM (every other Wednesday) – contact [Jaci Ladewig](#) to participate
- **Homeownership Division** – Thursday, June 11 at 2 PM – subscribe to '[Homeownership Program News and Updates](#)' to receive information on these calls
- **Affordable Rental Housing Division** – subscribe to '[Notices & Technical Advisories: Affordable Rental Housing Development](#)' to receive information on these calls
 - Owners and Manager Partner Call – June 8 from 3 – 4 pm
 - Phone: 631-992-3444 (or toll free: 877-273-4202); conference room number 4460912#.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MSL'.

Margaret Solle Salazar, Executive Director

