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Oregon Dedicates Revenue to Increase Housing Opportunity for Veterans

by Michael Anderson // 2013, Summer



Oregon Housing Alliance celebrated a huge victory in the last week of the 2013 Legislative Session with the passage of HB 2417, dedicating an increase to the state document recording fee towards meeting the range of housing needs of Oregon veterans. The legislation increases the document recording fee currently dedicated to affordable housing from \$15 to \$20 on the first page of real estate related recordings, committing the additional revenue to expanding housing opportunity for veterans. Estimates are that the increase will generate \$6 million during the 2013-2015 biennium.

The central message from the Housing Alliance and its supporters was clear: Oregon's heroes deserve a safe place to call home. Advocates circulated a summary of HB 2417 to legislators that opened with a call to action: *Our armed forces accept the responsibility of guarding our freedom. When they return to our communities, we have a duty to provide them time and stability to heal and readjust to a different way of life. We must help them find a clear and solid pathway back to a productive life at home.* Clearly, the legislature heard the message: HB 2417 moved through the House 55-4 and the Senate 29-0-1.

The campaign to pass HB 2417 was led by the Housing Alliance and its members, particularly Oregon Housing Authorities and the Community Action Partnership of Oregon. Other key partners included the

Washington County Housing Authority, St. Vincent De Paul of Lane County, Northwest Housing Alternatives, Central Oregon Veterans Outreach, Northwest Human Services, Community Action Team, Oregon ON and more.

Many Legislators also played key roles in the effort. Representative Greg Matthews (D-Gresham) was a key champion of the effort, and Chairs the House Veterans Services & Emergency Preparedness Committee. Other key champions were Representative Gene Whisnant (R-Sunriver), Representative Julie Parrish (R-Tualatin/West Linn), Senator Brian Boquist (R-Dallas) and Senator Alan Olsen (R-Canby). Prior to being voted on by the House and Senate, the bill moved through two House Committees, and a joint Ways & Means Committee.



Housing Alliance leader Janet Byrd presents awards to legislative champions Representatives Julie Parrish and Gene Whisnant

“Right now, too many veterans in Oregon struggle to find a safe, decent place to live. One out of every six men and women in our homeless shelters once wore a uniform in service to our country, and the youngest generation is struggling more. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who wind up homeless do so in three years, compared with 13 years for Vietnam-era veterans,” said Janet Byrd of the Housing Alliance. “We all, including our military veterans, need a safe, stable and affordable place to call home.”

HB 2417 provides a comprehensive approach to addressing the housing needs of veterans, from supportive housing for people returning with disabilities or injuries, to rent assistance to help prevent or end homelessness to assistance in buying their first home. Estimates are there are currently 7000 veterans experiencing homeless throughout the state. For veterans who are able to successfully transition to the workforce, many of the jobs available do not pay enough to afford the cost of housing and other basics.

Revenue generated from the increase will be distributed into three Oregon Housing Fund accounts: The General Housing Account, Homeownership Assistance Account and Emergency Housing Account. The revenue will be distributed in accordance to a formula established in 2009 legislation dedicating a \$15 increase to the document recording fee to affordable housing. 76% of the new revenue will go to the General Housing Account, which is used to develop new affordable housing or acquire and rehabilitate existing affordable housing. 14% will go to the Homeownership Assistance Account down-payment assistance, homeownership counseling, and assistance accessing the OR VET loan. 10% will go to the Emergency Housing Account help prevent or end homelessness through emergency rent assistance, case management, help with application fees, deposits and other costs associated with renting an apartment after a period of homelessness.

The Housing Alliance estimates that the \$6 million investment in housing opportunity in the upcoming biennium will result in 150 rental apartments for veterans, including apartments with supportive and/or medical services; 50 veterans and their families receiving down payment assistance, homeownership counseling and assistance accessing the OR VET loan; and at least 100 veterans and their families will be able to access emergency rent assistance, and other services related to preventing homelessness.

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