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October 14, 2015

Dear Margaret, Alison, and members of the LIFT Policy Subcommittee:

Thank you very much for your important work to develop recommendations for speedy and effective implementation of the LIFT bond program. As the statewide association of affordable housing and community development nonprofits, we at Oregon ON are closely following this process and will continue to champion this exciting new investment at every opportunity.

While we will have more feedback and suggestions to offer as the process moves forward, for the moment, we want briefly to weigh in on one foundational policy issue: **We urge you to include affordable homeownership for low-income families as an eligible use for the LIFT bonds.**

We know there are no easy answers for how and where to invest this precious new resource. We share the urgency to get the money out, projects completed and families housed.

Using a portion of the bonds for homeownership, either new construction or rehab, would be truly “fast track” (as compared to more complex multifamily projects) and thus will produce short-term successes, including in rural areas, to build momentum and maintain support for the new program.

In addition to simply allowing homeownership as an eligible use, we specifically urge you to consider Habitat for Humanity of Oregon/Proud Ground’s proposal to house low-income families through an innovative disbursed-site land trust pilot program, using LIFT funds. Statewide, Habitat serves diverse families with an average median income of 39% and who are DHS clients; the families served would be aligned with the Governor’s direction, and affordable homeownership would provide a long-term, stable opportunity for families to transition out of services to self-sufficiency.

We believe it is vital to establish a continuum of eligible uses, including homeownership, at the beginning of this program. Once the LIFT program is underway, it could prove difficult in the future to include additional eligible uses. To maximize the likelihood of success and impact, the LIFT program should be given the flexibility starting in this crucial first round of funding to serve the entire spectrum of housing opportunity for low-income families.

We look forward to discussion on this and other aspects of the program, and we thank you again for your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Miller'.

John Miller
Executive Director