

Testimony of Marie Strasbaugh in Support of SB 558

Chair Shields and Members of the Committee:

My name is Marie Strasbaugh, and my husband Bill and I live in Milwaukie, Oregon.

In 2006, we purchased our current home. Just a few months later, our mortgage lender decided to sell our loan to another lender. During the transition, I elected to make a payment by phone to make sure that no payments were missed.

Three months later, we were notified that the payment was never received. Not the following month, but three whole months. That was the beginning of a seven-year long nightmare, one which we're still sorting through today.

Soon after being notified of the lost payment, instead of being offered a chance to correct the situation, the associated debt was handed over to a collection agency. Every few months, without fail, hidden fees and costs have been added to our payment.

We have continued to pay, without fail, only to find the debt grow larger. Numerous times, the collection agency has attempted to foreclose on our home as a way to collect the accumulated debt. We've paid many thousands of dollars in legal fees in an effort to resolve the situation. You wouldn't believe how horribly we've been treated.

The legal fees and debts we incurred made it difficult for us to make our home payments. Bear in mind, we've owned five homes and one condo previously. We've never missed payments in our lives, and we've paid each of those homes off. I'm a retired educator and my husband has been awarded purple hearts in two wars. We're smart, dedicated, and hard working. We know how this works.

And so in an effort to keep our home, we decided to pursue Chapter 13 bankruptcy. We ultimately succeeded, but of course our credit has been completely ruined in the process.

Last year, we were able to take advantage of the President's refinance program, and reduce our monthly payments and our overall debt considerably. So things are much better in that regard. Our home is safe. And that's been worth every second of effort we've put into it. But it's come at a huge price.

We've been living scared. We've been victimized. We've been abused. I've recently been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome from the experience. He's advised me not to pay bills or handle money, as every time I do, I get upset, my hands shake, and I can't write. I even contemplated suicide, and I've never experienced those sorts of emotions before in my life. My husband has also

experienced heart problems, not knowing if we'd lose our home.

All of this could have been avoided were we offered a chance at mediation before the banks attempted to foreclose on us. That's all. In mediation, I'm confident the small headaches posed by a single misplaced payment could have been rectified, preventing years and years of major headaches and the turmoil that followed.

This isn't just our home, it's our children's home. This will be theirs someday. We've been able to fight for it, for them, but we shouldn't have had to.

It's horrible to see Americans treating other Americans this way. We are the ones who keep America going, that fight the Wars, that educate our children, that help our family and neighbors. We've actually opened our home to other family members who have also been hit during the current financial crisis and couldn't afford to live elsewhere.

We'd urge you to pass SB 558. For us, the damage is already done. But I'm here today to share our story in hopes that others don't have to experience the horrors that we've endured.

Thank you so much for this opportunity and for your consideration of this very important issue.

Marie Strasbaugh
Milwaukie, OR