



4110 SE Hawthorne Boulevard #503 | Portland, Oregon 97214  
Admin (503)222-6507 | Crisis (503)222-6222 | Fax (503)222-4754  
We believe that everyone deserves to live a life free from violence.

May 26, 2015

Capital Construction Sub-Committee of Ways and Means  
Oregon Housing and Community Services Bond Package

Co-Chair Girod, Co-Chair Read, Members of the Committee:

I am Caitlyn Kennedy at Raphael House of Portland, a multi-faceted domestic violence agency dedicated to fighting the causes and effects of intimate partner violence, including sexual violence. We offer an emergency shelter in a confidential location with a base stay of 30 days, safety planning and advocacy, housing and advocacy services to survivors, and extensive follow up services. I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the proposal to build Oregon's future by supporting a historic investment of \$100 million for affordable homes for families with low incomes.

We know that our communities can't succeed without homes. I am writing to you to share the story one of our shelter participants housing journey. She entered our domestic violence emergency shelter with her daughter on November 28, 2014. She was issued a Section 8 housing choice voucher at the end of January and we have supported this survivor in applying for at least a dozen apartments and have been unable to find a landlord/property manager/screening company that is willing to work with her. We were able to request and receive an extension for her voucher through May 29, 2015, and then most recently, we were able to advocate for a 2<sup>nd</sup> (and unheard of) extension giving us until the end of June. Our shelter has a maximum stay of 120 days and we have been able to extend her in shelter because of this voucher and the extenuating circumstances preventing her acceptance into an apartment. She has been in our shelter for nearly 6 months now, and if she loses this voucher we can no longer continue to have her stay in shelter. Having another month to try is fantastic, but after 5 months without a glimmer of hope, it is hard to remain hopeful that one more month will make the difference.

What we know is that in the Portland Metro rent has increased 11% in the last year and is only continuing to rise. We also see that landlords are finding creative loopholes, such as requiring people earn 3 to 4 times their rent, and this feels like an attempt to not work with people who have Section 8 vouchers. Most recently, according to Portland's 1<sup>st</sup> Annual State of Housing Report, for African American households there are no affordable apartments in this area based on the median income (\$27,923 for the average African American household), let alone for low income families.



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From January to April this survivor, with the support of her advocate, her housing advocate, and nearly the entire domestic violence community, to date has received about 12 denials, over half of which we have paid the application fees for, other times she was denied outright before they took her application fee. The reasons for the denials include “unacceptable rental history” (which she has rented over a decade prior to the present), “adverse credit” (score of 507, and this keeps lowering by 2-5 points every time an apartment does a credit check), “rent-to-income ratio” (we are seeing that landlords are requiring tenants to earn at least 3x the rent even with vouchers), “eviction” (though the eviction paperwork was never finalized and will be dropped off her record in August, and shows up randomly depending on the apartment), and “property debt” (which has been settled in full since January.) Every screening company seems to have a different reason to deny this survivor. One apartment, we appealed the decision twice, we offered a higher deposit to offset the “adverse credit”, which is reason they gave for the denial, and she still was not even considered.

This week, we applied for a place and she received a denial about one hour from turning in her application. The apartment found an outstanding PGE bill and denied her based on that. We communicated with the landlord that we could arrange payment for that bill. We were told by the apartment company that they would re-run her application once they receive verification that the bill was paid. We arranged payment of the debt, had the receipt in hand, and called the landlord back to receive a no again. We advocated for her to be reconsidered knowing this debt had been paid, and with offering a deposit of \$2000 or more, now we continue to wait.

I am writing to you to share this survivor’s story that further reflects the current state of housing in the Portland area. Something has to be done, and done now. This family, like many others, simply does not have the time to wait for the system to change. They need to be housed now. In my 3 years with this agency, I have never seen acquiring housing be so challenging. Even 6 months ago, if an individual got into a program that would help you pay your rent, you were practically all set. Now, even with the help of multiple programs, we are seeing handfuls of our families’ time out of these programs because we can’t find a landlord to approve them. We are even disclosing that many of their barriers are related to the domestic violence they have escaped from, and this is making no impact on their being considered. I truly don’t know how anyone is getting housed in this city.



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Thank you for your time in reading this letter and hearing our survivor's story. My organization and community, like dozens of communities throughout the state, is ready to unleash the ingenuity, innovation, and hard work that has defined Oregon for centuries. We can choose to invest in people and create a better future for the next generation. We urge your careful consideration of, and support for, this proposed historic investment in homes for Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Caitlyn Kennedy".

Caitlyn Kennedy, Housing Advocate  
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