

Justin Buri - HB 4001 Testimony 2.1.16

My name is Justin Buri, Executive Director of the Community Alliance of Tenants, Oregon's only statewide, grassroots, renters rights organization. Throughout our history, our members have identified no-cause evictions, a lack of repairs, and a lack of affordable housing, as the biggest barriers to Oregon tenants' ability to maintain safe and stable housing. Most Oregon renters live in private market housing with very few protections, and the threat or experience of a no-cause eviction is absolutely devastating.

A no-cause eviction can happen anytime to a tenant on a month-to-month lease, or at the end of a fixed-term lease. The tenant must move out, because there is essentially no defense against a no-cause eviction.

Tenants who have been victims of retaliation or discrimination have very little chance of proving why the landlord kicked them out, because the landlord doesn't have to give any stated cause or justifiable reason.

Lawyers and legal fees are simply too costly and risky for low-income tenants, even if they have a winnable case. Often because of the eviction,

the tenant has already lost all of their savings and maxed out their credit cards, as the cost of an unexpected move is in the thousands of dollars.

Low-income tenants throughout the state are living in dire, uninhabitable, life-threatening conditions, because they know that too often, if they ask for a repair, or try to defend their rights in some way, an eviction or rent increase will not be far behind. Is this an unreasonable fear? Given the fact that losing your home could mean you lose everything else, tenants are simply unwilling to take that risk.

The vulnerability and consequences of no-cause evictions are particularly dire among members of protected classes under the Fair Housing Act, such as renters with a disability, single mothers with children, seniors, immigrants and refugees and people of color. These tenants are more likely to receive a no-cause eviction, and their chances of finding and securing housing within the short 30- or 60-day window, are incredibly low. Unexpected, uncontestable no-cause evictions are not a mere inconvenience, they are an absolute devastation, with long-term, and community-wide consequences. Evictions are primary drivers of

homelessness, displacement, job loss, depression, stress and other health impacts, and they are a significant disruption in our children's education, often setting them back a full grade level or worse. These health, educational and economic disparities will persist, as low-income tenants continue to suffer the most extreme consequences of this disaster-like housing market that we find ourselves in.

Tenants need adequate protections against no-cause evictions and rent increases. HB 4001 is the first step in providing some of these protections. Tenants who pay their rent on time and have done nothing wrong deserve a reason, the right to remedy, and the right to remain.

Just Cause evictions protections work. Cities, counties and states across the US have successfully employed evictions protections to ensure housing stability for tenants, and landlords are still able to conduct their business.

Here in Oregon, we afford just-cause evictions protections to residents of manufactured homes and tenants living in subsidized housing. Today in the private market, no cause evictions are used against good, decent reliable tenants every day, without any risk or cost to the landlord. We need to shift

the balance of power in Oregon's Landlord-Tenant Act, so we can hold accountable bad actors on both sides, tenants and landlords alike. It's time that landlord recognize and take some responsibility for the devastating consequences of these actions.