



Deborah Kafoury Multnomah County Chair

501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97214
Phone: (503) 988-3308
Email: mult.chair@multco.us

March 1, 2017

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the House Human Services and Housing Committee;

I am writing in support of House Bill 2004, which would allow local communities to develop a response to an unprecedented housing crisis that is threatening thousands of families with homelessness.

The bill would establish just-cause eviction in the state of Oregon and allow cities and counties to develop rent stabilization programs. Both provisions are needed now more than ever.

Across Multnomah County, we are seeing a wave of no-cause evictions and steep rent increases that are forcing families and seniors to seek out new places to live. Many of the rent increases and evictions are coming as a result of buildings changing hands, with new ownership interested in gutting the building and in the process sending the current residents packing.

For the families who are impacted by this wave of disruption, finding an affordable apartment is a daunting task. For too many, losing their apartment leaves them homeless as they search for the next place to call home.

A healthy real estate market benefits us all, but a market constrained by high prices, low vacancies and speculative investment is a burden on hard-working Oregonians and taxpayers, as we work to ensure that no one is forced to sleep on our streets.

Multnomah County runs a 24-hour, seven-day family shelter. No family who seeks help is turned away. Over the past year, we have seen a surge of families who are homeless for the first time. The shelter runs at full capacity. We have funded overflow capacity at nearby hotels and motels and we are working feverishly to help each of these families get back on their feet and into stable housing.

But it's getting harder everyday. The waiting lists for housing are long. And rapidly rising rents mean that it costs us more to offer temporary rental assistance and housing placement services, which means we can help fewer families with our finite funding.

That's why we are investing in preventing homelessness, helping families bridge the gap between a steep rent increase and their next apartment.

You may have heard about the Normandy Apartments. In January the 18-unit apartment complex changed hands and the new owners sent out rent increase notifications to the tenants.

Rents were rising in some cases from \$600 to \$1,250 -- more than double. Twenty-six of the children living in the Normandy are students of nearby Rigler Elementary, five percent of the entire student body.

Multnomah County identified \$48,000 to provide temporary rent assistance to keep these children in their homes and complete the school year, minimizing the disruption to their education and the school community. We are working with our community partner, Latino Network, to deliver the support.

But this is not a success story. We were only able to temporarily delay the displacement of these families, and their children's loss of connection to their teachers, their classmates, and their community. We don't have the resources to offset these dramatic rent increases long-term, or to help all of the other children in Multnomah County who face eviction and displacement.

The story of the Normandy spotlights the challenges that renters face today in our housing market. Wages aren't keeping pace with the cost of housing, particularly for low-income workers. And too many of Multnomah County families are falling behind, making tough choices between paying the rent, paying for medicine, or paying the grocery bill.

So I believe we have a choice. We can continue doing the same thing we've always done, and hope that the invisible hand of the market swoops in before another mass eviction or 100-percent rent increase. Or, we can do something about it.

House Bill 2004 is a chance to take action and give tenants the peace of mind of knowing that they won't be denied their home without cause and without reason, and to give local communities the opportunity to decide how best to address the crisis that unchecked rent increases are causing for families.

Sincerely,



Deborah Kafoury
Multnomah County Chair