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March 2, 2017

House Committee on Human Services and Housing

Re: Support for HB 2004

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chairs Stark and Sanchez, and Committee Members:

My name is Kira Meyrick and I am the Administrative Projects Coordinator at Clackamas Women's Services (CWS). For over 30 years, CWS has provided critical services — including emergency and confidential shelter, a 24/7 crisis line, mental health counseling, support groups, legal advocacy, and community education — to survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, elder abuse, and human trafficking.

Prior to my current position, I worked at our confidential emergency shelter for nearly four years as a case manager, where I assisted survivors with safety planning and housing resources. Throughout my tenure, I witnessed firsthand the importance of housing stability for this population. While it has always been a challenge to help survivors secure affordable and safe housing, the soaring rental costs and dwindling vacancy rates render this an increasingly insurmountable feat. Far too often, victims are left with the untenable choice of returning to their abuser or exiting into homelessness.

A story that illustrates the impact of our current housing crisis on survivors is that of a woman who recently reached out to CWS for support. A mother of three fleeing an abusive relationship, she worked with one of our case managers and received support in finding an apartment, as well as a six-month housing subsidy to cover her rent. However, even though she is college educated and working in a fulltime position, she does not earn enough to sustain her rent. This is despite living in a neighborhood with lower rental rates for the region and commuting an hour-and-a-half each way to her job in a more expensive part of town. Further, her sole family member — her father — passed away during this period, leaving her without critical family support. Facing either homelessness or moving back in with her abuser, she reached out to co-workers and friends and is currently rotating between their guest bedrooms and couches. With the dearth of affordable units, she has little hope of achieving housing stability for family.

Sadly, this woman's story is far from unique. Oregon has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the nation — more than half of our state's women and girls have or will experience domestic violence and/or sexual assault — and these victims are disproportionately burdened by rent increases, eviction, or threat of displacement. A recent report by the Portland Housing Bureau has found that rental costs have increased by 30% in the Portland-metro area since 2012. In 2016, Portland rents continued to increase at an average rate of 7% over the previous year—or roughly \$75 per month.¹ For victims of domestic violence and assault, especially those supporting children on one income, these costs are impossible to meet.

Just-cause evictions and reasonable housing costs are critical to ensuring that all Oregonians, especially our most vulnerable members, can achieve safety, security, and self-sufficiency. I urge you to support HB 2004, and provide much-needed fairness and stability for these women and children, as well as the millions of renters in Oregon.

Sincerely,
Kira Meyrick

¹ "State of Housing in Portland," Portland Housing Bureau, 2016.