

March 2, 2017

Dear Members of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing,

On behalf of the Urban League of Portland, I respectfully request your support for HB 2004 to end no-cause evictions and repeal the ban on rent stabilization. Established in 1945, the Urban League of Portland is one of the oldest African American service, civil rights and advocacy organizations in the area. We are part of a network of over 90 National Urban League Affiliates across the country and are recognized as one of the leading voices for African Americans and other people of color in the region. Our mission is to empower African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security and quality of life. Our programs include a distinctive blend of direct services, organizing, outreach, and advocacy. The Urban League endorses and supports the passage of HB 2004 as it is so important to our community.

While many landlords are doing right by their tenants, those who aren't use no-cause evictions to avoid the simple legal process for removing tenants. Instead of identifying a valid reason to remove a family from their home, bad actor landlords are terminating leases to raise rents, or even worse, discriminate against certain tenants. No-cause evictions are also used to retaliate against tenants who ask for necessary and reasonable repairs, making renters afraid to request basic repairs needed to keep their homes safe and habitable. Extreme rent increases cause immense financial hardship on working families that can force them to deplete their savings, putting them in danger of becoming homeless and send them into a spiral of poverty. Moreover, these practices disproportionately impact families of color, worsening inequities and pulling communities apart, although this cycle can happen to anyone.

Across Oregon, people are experiencing extreme rent increases that are forcing them out of their homes and communities. In particular, the African-American and Black communities of Oregon have been systematically displaced by many unfair housing practices, including drastic rent increases and no-cause evictions. Finding a new affordable apartment near their current home is a serious challenge in our state's highly competitive rental markets. Large rent increases mean families spend more of their income on housing, and less on other basic necessities like food, medicine, and utilities. Four in ten Oregonians rent their home and more than 60% of Black families are renters, being potentially vulnerable to unpredictable housing changes.

Additionally, evictions and economic displacement impact us all by putting more economic burden on our communities through increased demands on social services, shelters, and hospitals by families who become homeless and other costs associated with the disruption caused by housing instability. By contrast, stable homes promote educational opportunity for children and economic opportunity for families – allowing Oregonians to save for a house, pursue new employment options, and open new businesses.

HB 2004 will protect housing stability by creating a just cause eviction standard, which would require a legitimate reason for termination, such as a lease violation or a landlord's business or family necessity; and by repealing the state prohibition on local jurisdictions' ability to consider rent stabilization policies, such as ordinances that would slow the rate and speed of rent increases for tenants while still allowing landlords a reasonable rate of return.

Renters who pay rent on time and comply with the rules are still at risk of displacement. We hope that you will join us in support of HB 2004 to help Oregon families not only survive but thrive.

Thank you,

Amira Streeter

Policy and Advocacy Director