

Testimony of Cara Shufelt,
Co-Director of the Rural Organizing Project
In Support of HB 2004
March 2nd, 2017

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

The Rural Organizing Project (ROP), a statewide organization of locally-based groups that work to create communities accountable to a standard of human dignity, supports HB 2004. The Rural Organizing Project started in 1992 based in grassroots human dignity groups in rural counties throughout Oregon. Since then we have grown to where we now have over 50 groups in 28 counties. We are working towards a vision of economic security, democracy and human dignity for all.

Many landlords are doing right by their tenants, but those who aren't are harming families and damaging communities. Right now, some landlords are using 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. They are also used to retaliate against tenants who ask for necessary repairs, making renters afraid to request basic repairs needed to keep their homes safe and habitable. Evictions with no reason and extreme rent increases cause immense financial hardship on working families that can force them to deplete their savings, force them into homelessness and send them into a spiral of poverty. Moreover, these practices disproportionately impact families of color, worsening inequities and pulling communities apart.

In addition, families across Oregon are experiencing extreme rent increases that are forcing them out of their homes and communities. Finding a new affordable apartment near their current home is a serious challenge in our state's highly competitive rental markets. Even if a family does not lose their home, large rent increases mean families spend more of their income on housing, and less on other basic necessities like food, medicine, and heat. Four in ten Oregonians rent their home; this translates to roughly 1.5 million people in our state being potentially vulnerable to unpredictable housing changes.

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.

We hope that you will join us in support of HB 2004 to ensure rural and small town Oregonians have access to safe, stable and affordable housing.

Thank you,
Cara Shufelt
Co-Director, Rural Organizing Project