

To the Oregon State Senate,

I urge you to vote yes on a strong and unamended HB 2004.

I believe that the central question of this debate about rent stabilization and tenants rights is a very basic one: **what is housing for?**

The people on my side of this debate (pro tenant protections, pro rent stabilization) believe that housing is for people to live in. As such, we believe that **the role of housing policy is to create a system in which every person has housing which is safe, stable, affordable, and appropriate to their needs.** In addition, we believe that if other people or private companies can make money by participating in such as system, that's great. It makes the whole thing run more smoothly. However, **the first priority is a housing system which houses people.** That piece is non-negotiable.

The people on the other side of the debate order their priorities differently. **To them, housing is first and foremost a business,** and it exists to make money. Because they are generally good people, they also think it would be great if the housing system could create safe, stable, affordable, and appropriate housing for everyone while making money. However, the first priority is their profits. They would sooner see hundreds of people homeless or in untenable housing arrangements than work to create a housing system whose first priority is housing. **We know this because that is the world we live in.**

That's the question before the State of Oregon right now: **what are our priorities?** When we have to choose between a landlord receiving maximum profit and a person having housing which is safe, stable, affordable, and appropriate to their needs, which will be choose? It would be nice if we never had to make hard decisions, but promises of the magic of the free market ring hollow in the aftermath of a housing collapse created by excessive investment in a deregulated housing market.

Finally, I would like to address one of the major arguments against this bill: that it will scare away investment and result in substantially less housing stock over the medium term and thus cause rents to rise overall. In the present economic climate, this is nonsense. With interest rates on US Treasuries near zero, and a glut of financial capital in the international markets, investors are desperate for anything that will give them a 5% rate of return with some stability. For the same reasons that everybody recognizes now is the time to build infrastructure, now is the time to regulate the housing market. Developers, landlords, and real estate finance professionals will tell you horror stories about investors who threaten to pull out of projects. But where are they going to put that money? In a bond that delivers 2.5% annually? Not likely. They may be spooked by change, but they'll back for as long as people keep moving to Oregon and pushing up the demand for housing. Don't be fooled.

Vote yes on HB 2004, with all of its present protections in place. We are watching and we will remember.

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