

To: Joint Committee on Coronavirus Response
From: Alicia Temple, Oregon Law Center
Date: March 20, 2020
Re: Low Income Communities during COVID-19

Co-Chairs Roblan and Holvey and Members of the Committee:

First, thank you so much for all the work the committee is doing now to provide a quick state response to help Oregonians in this time of crisis.

The Oregon Law Center very much appreciates the Co-Chairs' draft proposal on OLIS and would like to draw your attention to a few important additional considerations below:

Housing:

An eviction moratorium so vital, thank you for including it! It is so critical for the economic stability of vulnerable Oregonians at this time.

There are a couple additional provisions that should be added to provide true stability to families. Oregonians who are in their first year of occupancy can still receive an eviction without a cause under the protections passed in 2019 (SB 608). We would encourage the Legislature to provide protection to these Oregonians as well. We would also encourage the Legislature to consider delaying any eviction that is not related to the immediate safety of other tenants in the building or the landlord. Evictions related to violations of the lease – which could include noise complaints as children are home from school, or other minor violations – should be temporarily suspended to maintain housing stability. There are models of eviction moratoriums from other states, such as Texas, that create these robust protections for families at risk of losing their housing.

Vulnerable Oregonians living in Long Term Care Facilities should also be protected from being evicted for any reason. As a population that is particularly at risk in this crisis, and often without other options of places to live, the state should halt all involuntary move-outs in Long Term Facilities.

Food:

In addition to supporting the state to apply for all Pandemic EBT and any other federal opportunity, the state must ensure that no one loses **any** of their benefits in the time of crisis by halting **all** public benefit terminations, including SNAP and TANF. In addition, we anticipate the state's SNAP caseload to double if not more in the coming weeks, and should ensure DHS has the staff and resources to meet the quickly growing need.

Utilities:

Some utilities have committed to not shutting off service, but everyone should be protected. In addition to funding to provide assistance, there should be Utility Shut-off protection for households that are having trouble keeping up with their bills.

Unemployment Insurance:

These are great expansions of UI to help get cash into people's hands as soon as possible. Unfortunately, not all workers qualify for UI. An expanded UI needs to include access for contract workers, for workers who had been on the job for a short time and assistance for workers who cannot work but do not qualify for federal UI due to documentation status.

We continue to communicate with the Governor's office and individual agencies on some of these items, knowing actions may be done by the executive branch. OLC has also submitted recommendations for OHA and DHS to make it easier for people to access benefits and many of those actions can be done from the agencies directly. However, we appreciate the legislature's interest and direction in these matters, especially when so many low income Oregonians need critical assistance during this crisis.