

Dear Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response,

On Saturday, March 21st, Dawn Duerksen of Duerksen Property Management sent an email to Rental Property Management Group (RPMG), an organization of property managers and landlords. Duerksen's email urged landlords and property managers to contact legislators and demand that any rent relief provided in the wake of COVID-19 goes directly to their own pockets instead of to tenants.

Duerksen's proposal is an attempt to secure their own profit before meeting the needs of tenants. Giving rent relief directly to landlords and property managers will not serve to support the tenants and working people jeopardized by the COVID-19 crisis, but will extend the power and control that landlords hold over tenants. Aid must be delivered directly to tenants for housing relief to be an effective intervention.

By blocking direct financial relief to tenants, Duerksen would rob thousands of people of the agency to choose their own housing, thereby trapping many in inadequate, exploitative, and unsanitary housing conditions without accessible recourse.

Duerksen's email revealed their desire to establish bureaucratic obstacles preventing tenants from accessing rent relief. They would require tenants to produce "some sort of documentation from their employer that there is no work available, and that unemployment benefits for their households do not meet their needs" (Dawn Duerksen), implying that if we cannot produce satisfying proof, we do not deserve to keep our homes. This request presents a number of problems for rent-strapped tenants, employers, and government alike. We identify that:

1. Duerksen does not describe what this documentation would look like.
2. Duerksen does not describe how tenants would document that unemployment benefits are insufficient for our needs.
3. We cannot obtain documentation from our employers if we are no longer employed by them. The *Los Angeles Times* has reported that [nearly 20% of people have lost their jobs or hours due to the coronavirus](#) and we can only expect this to get worse.
4. Criteria for assessing these documents may exclude tenants who need help, thereby introducing precarity that worsens the economic and public health threats posed by the pandemic.
5. Added bureaucracy inherent to means testing will increase the burden on the state and taxpayers alike in this time of crisis, without providing additional benefit to either.

Duerksen would rather give landlords limitless discretionary power and create a bureaucratic minefield requiring immense time and energy from tenants, employers, and government to navigate, rather than simply enabling tenants to keep their homes in the midst of a global pandemic and recession. Duerksen even seeks to accept rent while maintaining the enforceability of termination/eviction notices: "Can waiver rules [specifically SB 608] be temporarily suspended due to this crisis allowing landlords to accept rent, but keep their notice valid?"

Now is not the time to be kicking tenants out of their homes. Governor Kate Brown has responded by declaring a 90-day moratorium on evictions throughout Oregon as of Sunday, March 22. However, as Duerksen's email clearly demonstrates, this moratorium will be targeted by those who put profit over people. We must ensure that the eviction moratorium remains in place for its full 90 days and is extended without delay in the likely event that the pandemic crisis continues at the end of that time period.

As tenants, we understand what housing relief should look like to effectively and equitably protect Oregon tenants during this crisis. Needed relief will:

1. **Remove the burden of rent from tenants without removing their agency, either by freezing rent collection entirely or by distributing funds directly to tenants so that they can make full rent payments out of pocket;**
2. **Enforce Governor Brown's moratorium on evictions and commit to renewing it as needed, while simultaneously and immediately halting all evictions currently in progress;**
3. **Prohibit sweeps and other punitive law enforcement actions against houseless people, who are among the most at-risk already from this economic and public health crisis.**

These proposals are already under consideration in jurisdictions across the country. Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York has announced a 90 day [suspension of evictions](#). The City of Portland has issued an [eviction moratorium](#) protecting those who have lost income from COVID-19. Housing advocacy groups are calling for a [suspension of rent collection](#) across the country. All we ask for is economic relief that will keep people in their homes thereby shortening this pandemic.

For millions of Americans, rent is due in less than two weeks. Trump's Oval Office speech on the 11th quickly shut down vast swaths of the US economy including airlines, schools, restaurants, and hotels. Many universities, including Oregon State University, had already shut down or prepared to shut down in the days before Trump's announcement. Millions of Americans, many of whom live paycheck to paycheck, haven't been paid since the middle of March.

And rent is due in ten days.

The link between housing and public health is clear and urgent. The worst case scenario is that an expanding houseless population inflames an already critical public health catastrophe. To safely weather this crisis, Oregonians universally require access to permanent shelter and its standard sanitary resources, like sinks, showers, and toilets. Without access to shelter for quarantine or the sanitary amenities required for viral decontamination, this pandemic will worsen, precisely at a time when overwhelming financial precarity is stressing our immune systems and jeopardizing more than ever the ability of ordinary people to afford both housing and healthcare. Steps must be taken before the first of April to resolve these issues or COVID-19 may become uncontainable and the US will suffer a housing crash at the worst possible moment. We must think and prepare for a fast-moving crisis and slow recovery, and this is exactly what our proposals take steps toward accomplishing.

For this crisis, state action is perhaps even more critical than federal action, since you are entrusted with the health, safety, and morals of your communities. We cannot expect the United States Congress or the president to save us. The president can mobilize resources, but governors and state legislatures have the widest latitude to manage this crisis in a manner informed by intimate familiarity with the unique obstacles and needs experienced by their citizens. We the people know it, and the media knows it — and we are all watching. Taking immediate, decisive action to protect the citizens of your state serves as a model to the entire nation as we confront COVID-19 and all the levels of leadership that have failed us. We urge you to follow the steps we have requested in this letter, thereby enacting a model that protects Oregonians and inspires others to needed action in the dark weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,

Erin Kanzig
she/her
Master of Public Policy Student
CGE VP of Bargaining
Oregon State University