



June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Senate Interim Committee on Housing and Development  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Fagan  
Vice Chair Heard

Chair Fagan and members of the committee: Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me to speak today on behalf of Oregon's landlord industry.

My name is Jim Straub. I've been a landlord for 30 years and come to you today speaking as the Legislative Director for the Oregon Rental Housing Association. We consist of 14 local chapters with over 7,000 members located throughout the entire state. From Ontario to Coos Bay and Klamath Falls to Portland, we truly represent all of Oregon.

We understand the stress and uncertainty this crisis brings upon those living in our housing. We are trying to communicate more, and offer reassurance whenever possible. We do fear for our residents' ability to make their payments, particularly in the coming months. While most are paying their rent, we know that many other bills are being left unpaid. Expenses are piling up, and a cascade of nonpayments might soon be on the horizon. We hope this is avoidable.

Landlords are struggling as well. Maintenance costs are higher due to increased utility and facility usage during the stay-at-home order. The number of contractors willing to do work on occupied units is significantly less, and when they are available, they are sometimes charging a premium for their service. We, as landlords, have a legal and moral obligation to maintain the properties in habitable condition. In some cases, tenants are reporting failures of appliances, fixtures or essential services but because of their fear of the virus, are refusing to allow contractors to even enter the property. This creates a compounding effect of deferred maintenance and escalating damage.

How can the Legislature help? Hopefully, in several ways:

1. The Governor's order makes it a class C misdemeanor (which is an arrestable offense, of up to 30 days in jail) for landlords to communicate with their residents about past due rent amounts. We object to this criminalization of peaceful communication relating to a legal contract between adult Oregonians. We believe it undermines the order of law and threatens to destabilize our communities more than it protects individuals. This may have been deemed necessary by some in the opening days of the pandemic, but it is just grossly unfair at this point.

2. Require residents to notify the property owner in writing of COVID-related financial hardship and that they are requesting assistance/relief from the property owner. We have a surprising number of residents that haven't paid their rent, and simply won't communicate with us at all.
3. Create an emergency rental and utility assistance program for those residents impacted by the crisis.
4. Encourage landlords to lower or forgive rent by offering incentives such as tax credits.

The eviction moratorium that Governor Brown issued will stop immediate displacement of tenants, but only until the order ends. What happens then? We fear that tenants will be placed in economic peril and simply will not be able to catch up on living expenses. All the while, property owners' utilities, insurance, and tax payments are all still coming due. Homes still need to be maintained, and less rent coming in coupled with higher maintenance costs, significantly increases the risk of foreclosure to home owners. Landlords losing their properties, or not having the money to maintain them, helps no one in this already troubled time.

Thank you very much for your time and for your service to our citizens and state during these challenging days.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim Straub", with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jim Straub  
Legislative Director  
Oregon Rental Housing Association