

Chair Fagan, Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Karla Spence. I am a Salem resident, and a member of the SEIU retirees local, and I am here today to express my support for SB 608.

As a retired Department of Human Services case manager, I spent my career taking care of vulnerable people, and I have seen firsthand the fear that comes from living with financial and housing instability. When a family's overall housing costs are over 30% of their income, they are struggling; and a family is one economic disaster – say a single rent spike – away from being out of their homes.

These are the kind of odds people are facing in a state where no-cause evictions are legal, landlords are not required to provide any sort of assistance when they displace people, and rents can be raised without reason. Renters of all ages are left completely on their own in a housing market that shows no mercy.

For many of the families I have worked with or seen in my career, eviction and displacement can mean loss of community ties, deterioration of health, and even premature and costly institutionalization on taxpayer dollars.

Today's housing crises has made the instability in our communities worse. Where I used to see this every day at work, now I see it every day in my own life.

Let me tell you about my next-door neighbors and their camper. My neighbors are elderly, and she is disabled. Like many people I have worked with over my career, they are on a fixed income, living paycheck-to-paycheck, and are one financial surprise away from making dramatic decisions about medication, food, and housing that no one should have to make. They have had an old camper sitting on their property for a long time. A trailer unfit for habitation.

Recently, they were told by the city that they had to get rid of trailer. They didn't have the \$300 to get rid of it, so I put it online for them, trying to find someone to take it away for free. In first two hours I got 87 responses. Every one of the from people begging to have it because they needed a place to stay.

One was from a woman who was about to give birth and was living in her car. She just wanted a place to stay with her new-born.

Another family asked me to come look at it. I insisted that it wasn't in any condition to be lived in, but they begged me to see if they could fix it up. They arrived in the broken down pick-up they clearly lived in with their three kids.

No-cause evictions and massive rent increases have wreaked havoc on our communities, and over the last several years the threat has become more dire. These are people who've lived in our community for years who are now being chased out, told they don't belong anymore.

Housing is a basic need. If you work hard and play by the rules, you should be able to afford to be in your own home.

Oregon tenants have waited years for our leadership to take action. To do something to protect people from the unjustness of no-cause evictions and rent spikes.

The time for waiting is over. I strongly urge state lawmakers to once and for all step up to help seniors, families, and others who are on the verge of homelessness and displacement and pass statewide tenant protections.

Please vote “yes” on SB 608.