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## Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force

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### Senate Committee on Housing Testimony in Support of SB608 February 4, 2019

Chair Fagan, Vice-Chair Girod, and Members of the Senate Housing Committee,

On behalf of The Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force, **I write to urge your strong support of SB 608**, which would provide critical protections against no-cause evictions and extreme rent increases for the 40% of Oregon households who rent their homes. Fair, stable, affordable housing is critical to reducing the risk of sexual violence, and would **alleviate some of the disproportionate burden on victims of sexual assault**.

The Sexual Assault Task Force is a private, non-profit, non-governmental statewide agency with over 100 multi-disciplinary members appointed by Attorney General Rosenblum. Members serve as advisors on 1 of 8 subcommittees including: Campus, Criminal Justice, Legislative & Public Policy, Medical-Forensic, Men's Engagement, Offender Management, Prevention Education, and Victim Response.

Our mission is to advance a multi-disciplinary, survivor-centered approach to the prevention of and response to sexual violence in Oregon. Our goal is to prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place, while simultaneously improving our response efforts to mitigate trauma and ensure the safety and security of all victims.

People who experience homelessness also experience high levels of sexual violence. This is particularly true for women, people of color, and LGBTQ youth who experience disproportionately higher rates of violence<sup>1</sup>. The precarious nature of housing instability, caused by drastic rent increases and no cause evictions, increases the likelihood of sexual violence. Victims are more likely to experience sexual violence perpetrated by someone they know; and for homeless women and youth, this is typically by someone they go to for help. This is often in the form of forced, coerced, or manipulated sexual activity in exchange for survival, such as access to a shower, a couch to sleep on, or food and other life-saving needs. Perpetrators choose victims based on their vulnerability, their accessibility, and their perceived lack of credibility – and these are often the same individuals who experience increased barriers to reporting and access to services. This is particularly troubling in Oregon, where sexual violence against women is the second highest in the country (after Alaska).<sup>2</sup>

Loss of housing is a precipitating factor for higher levels of psychological distress, including post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>3</sup>, compounding the trauma experienced when an incident of violence occurs. The chaos of homelessness, coupled with a traumatic event of sexual assault means victims are at an

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<sup>1</sup> Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization— National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/summaryreports.html>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Surviving Sexual Violence on the Streets: A Know-Your-Rights Film for Homeless Women. Victim Rights Law Center. <https://www.victimrights.org/surviving-sexual-violence-streets>

increased risk for mental health problems, including substance abuse, depression, and suicide attempts. This psychological distress compromises their ability to regain residential stability and realize an increased quality of life.

Passage and implementation of SB608 would provide protection for the most vulnerable in our community, and reduce the rates of sexual violence experienced as a result of housing instability caused by rent increases and evictions. For these reasons, we urge your support of SB608.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MRS', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

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