

February 4, 2019

Senator Shemia Fagan
Oregon State Senate Housing Committee
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Support for SB 608

Dear Chair Fagan and Members of the Committee:

I am an attorney with Legal Aid Services of Oregon Salem Regional Office, writing to express my support for Senate Bill 608. I represent low-income Oregonians in both Marion and Polk Counties. My practice includes representation in a significant number of housing matters: I thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Legal Aid's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. One of the most salient issues in our clients' lives is the challenge to find and maintain safe, stable, affordable housing. Without stable housing, it is difficult or impossible for families to hold down a job, keep children in school, access neighborhood amenities, and stay healthy.

In my work as a poverty attorney, I encounter a steady stream of low-income Oregonians touched by no-cause eviction notices. Many of the people I see are disabled; many of them are veterans; and, many are victims of domestic violence. I would like to impress upon you that my work is often to deliver very bad news to the individuals who come to my office looking for hope. "I am sorry," I tell them in most cases, "your landlord is permitted to end your tenancy without cause. You will need to begin looking for somewhere else to live, or else your landlord will file an eviction case against you in court." Those clients had assumed that because they had paid their rent on time and had lived in their homes for many years, their landlords would need some good cause to evict them. Giving the bad news does not get any easier, especially because I know it means those clients are very vulnerable to becoming homeless.

Looking for a new place to live in the current rental market is far easier said than done. The current market conditions do not favor tenants, and there is an ongoing shortage of affordable housing. One of my clients, a young woman fleeing domestic violence, could not find stable housing for herself and her three children for over six months. She and her children lived in shelters during that time, disrupting the children's routines and their

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schooling. That dynamic is not unique. For many of my clients, a housing crisis intersects with and exacerbates other poverty-related turmoil in their lives.

Senators, I have seen first-hand how the current market conditions have only emboldened some bad actors in our community. Living with the looming threat of a no-cause eviction makes my clients even more vulnerable. At its worst, the threat of no-cause eviction can be used as a tool of abuse. I have worked with a disabled client who was sexually assaulted by her landlord and was too afraid to report it. The landlord had ominously alluded to the possibility to terminating her tenancy; the client remained silent for *years*, for fear that coming forward would lead to an eviction notice.

One of my clients, Robert, gave me permission to share some of the specific details of his case. Robert has been living in his home for over a decade with his family, including young children. Making ends meet is a challenge for him, especially with current rental costs. He has been paying over \$1,000 per month to live in a modest one-family home. When a plumbing problem caused his toilet and shower to stop working, Robert let his landlord know, and he asked for repairs. The landlord had a plumber come to the residence and an estimate was prepared. Rather than contract for the recommended repairs to the sewer line, the landlord placed a portable toilet in Robert's front yard. The landlord then told Robert that he and his family could shower somewhere else. Robert questioned the legality of the landlord's actions. Within 48 hours, the landlord served Robert with a no-cause eviction notice. I have been to Robert's house personally. Attached is a photo of the portable toilet still sitting in Robert's front yard. If Robert had the benefit of the protections in SB 608, he could not have been evicted without cause in retaliation for seeking legitimate and necessary repairs. He would not have been vulnerable to the same imbalance of power he is currently facing.

Even though retaliation is theoretically illegal under Oregon's current law, the fact that landlords are allowed to evict without cause makes it very hard to implement those protections. In today's market, tenants are afraid to complain about violations or to assert their rights, due to the ease with which a no-cause eviction could render them homeless.

I urge you to support SB 608. This bill will help innumerable low-income Oregonians, and it will help restore a more equitable balance of power between landowners and tenants. Please help me help the people of our communities.

Sincerely,



Rachael A. Federico
Attorney at Law

