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February 1, 2019

Re: Support for SB 608

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

My name is Melissa Erlbaum and I am the executive director of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS), a community-based non-profit that provides critical services — including emergency and confidential shelter, a 24/7 crisis line, mental health counseling, support groups, legal advocacy, and community education — to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. **On behalf of CWS and the vulnerable families, individuals and children we serve, I urged you to support SB608, which would provide housing stability to those fleeing violence and abuse and those currently housed and living in our communities healing through the experience of abuse.**

Throughout my over 20-year tenure in the field, I have witnessed firsthand the importance of housing stability for this population. While it has always been a challenge to help survivors secure affordable and safe housing, the soaring rental costs and dwindling vacancy rates render this increasingly difficult. Too many victims are now left with the untenable choice of returning to their abuser or exiting into homelessness.

Our agency's staff, particularly those who serve in our emergency shelter or in direct service roles, work daily with survivors who, despite working full time and making countless financial sacrifices, do not earn enough to meet the climbing housing costs. Even when survivors are matched with a housing subsidy from our agency, it is a challenge to find a fair-market unit and nearly impossible for the recipient to sustain this after the assistance ends with costs raising at this rate. No-cause evictions, especially coupled with the historically low vacancy rates, serve as yet another growing barrier to achieving safety and stability.

This issue impacts our employees as well. Dedicated and hard-working CWS employees have been served no cause evictions simply so the landlord can drastically increase the rent. They are put in the position of having to navigate this hardship while also supporting survivors of domestic violence in their daily work as well. As nonprofit employees doing some of the most valuable work in our community they should not be in this position. This crisis is very real.

In Clackamas County and the larger state, skyrocketing rents and no-cause evictions have contributed to an unprecedented housing crisis. As the Executive Director of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS), a community-based non-profit that provides critical services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, I have witnessed firsthand the disproportionate effects of housing instability on our community's most vulnerable members, who are often forced to either stay in abusive relationships or face homelessness.

Sadly, this is a state-wide problem. Oregon has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the nation — more than half of our state's women and girls have or will experience domestic violence

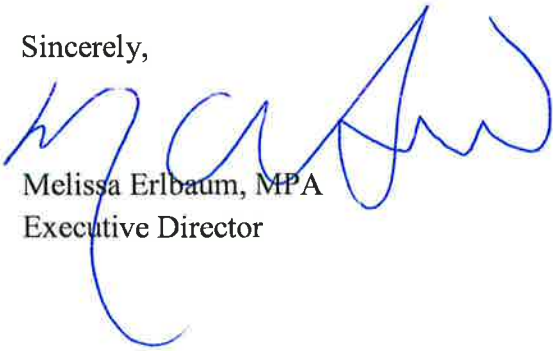
and/or sexual assault — and these victims are disproportionately burdened by rent increases, eviction, or threat of displacement. A recent report by the Portland Housing Bureau has found that rental costs have increased by 30% in the Portland-metro area since 2012. For victims of domestic violence and assault, especially those supporting children on one income, these costs are impossible to meet.

Housing is especially critical to survivors' pursuit of safety, stability, and self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, affordable housing is becoming increasingly elusive for survivors and their families, even for those working full-time or multiple jobs. Even if survivors are lucky enough to find housing, they still have to contend with no-cause evictions. While our agency regularly works with supportive and ethical landlords, we have also witnessed some bad-actor landlords regularly use no-cause evictions in retaliation to requested repairs or reports of domestic violence. A no-cause eviction leaves a survivor — who has done nothing wrong — scrambling, and often failing — to secure new housing.

Just-cause evictions and reasonable housing costs are critical to ensuring that all Oregonians, especially our most vulnerable members, can achieve safety, security, and self-sufficiency. I urge you to support SB 608, and provide much-needed fairness and stability for survivors of violence, as well as the millions of renters in Oregon.

I urge your support for SB 608.

Sincerely,



Melissa Erlbaum, MPA
Executive Director