

February 15, 2019

Representative Alissa Keny-Guyer  
House Human Services and Housing Committee  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**Re: Support for SB 608**

Dear Representative Keny-Guyer 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.

There are undoubtedly many wonderful, hardworking property owners throughout our state. I have met some of them, and I am confident that they would have no difficulty implementing or following the proposed legislation. Unfortunately, however, there are also some property owners who use their relative positions of power to displace or exploit low-income members of our community. Representatives, I have seen first-hand how the current market conditions have only emboldened some bad actors. For example, my office has seen at least one recent mass eviction from a building bought by out-of-state landowners.

Living with the looming threat of a no-cause eviction makes my clients even more vulnerable. At its very 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. If that client had had the protections of SB 608, I believe her story would have had a much different, happier ending.

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 have seen clients who opted to live for long periods with egregious cockroach or bedbug infestations rather than to risk speaking up. Those clients perceived that their landlords would terminate their tenancy if they dared to rock the boat by demanding any repairs. In one case, a landlord alluded to the ease with which my client's tenancy could be terminated and suggested that my client could move out if she did not like living with an ongoing infestation.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rachael A. Federico". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Rachael A. Federico  
Attorney at Law