

Written Testimony for SB 608

To: The House Human Services and Housing Committee and Chair Keny-Guyer, and Vice-Chairs Noble and Sanchez

Re: Support for SB 608

We are writing on behalf of Portland State University's Women's Resource Center to urge your support of SB 608. We represent the confidential advocates that support the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Program on campus. As advocates who have legal confidentiality and privilege, we have been able to offer services to students experiencing sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, and stalking. We help them navigate the student conduct process, participate in Title IX investigations, make police reports, and receive related medical care. We also assist students in accessing supportive measures to keep them engaged with their educational programs. This can include helping them drop and refund their classes, submit petitions to stay in school, navigate financial aid and on and off campus housing changes.

The goal of our work as advocates is to help reduce and remove barriers for students so that they may persist in their academic program. Additionally we care about providing a process for all students that is equitable, supportive, and mitigates the impact of harm. This senate bill would provide critical protections for students and survivors' against no-cause evictions and the extreme rental increases for the 40% of Oregon households who rent their homes. Providing fair, stable, and affordable housing is imperative to our mission of equity as well as necessary for a survivors' ability to escape violence.

For the student survivors we serve, rent spikes create a massive barrier for accessing safe housing. Due to the current rent increases, survivors' who have successfully fled abuse are forced to return to abusive homes to avoid other alternatives, like homelessness. Leaving abuse can be financially binding in general, let alone as students in college. When children are involved, it becomes even harder with the limited resources available for survivors'. It is impossible to escape abuse if you cannot afford to pay rent. With minimal legal rights and lack of access to resources, Oregon's rental housing is putting people in danger on a daily basis, across the state.

In our experience working as confidential advocates, it is easy to understand why housing stability and security were the highest needs identified by survivors and advocates across the state. Portland State is the largest university in the entire state of Oregon. Almost 80% of our 28,000 students are Oregon residents. The majority of them live in the Portland Metro and Tri-County (Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas counties) areas. We have witnessed countless times how constrained we were when presenting housing options to our clients. Whether it's the cost of living, experiencing financial abuse, being a student, or having children, options and choices for students and survivors are significantly reduced due to the coupling of rental increases and no-cause evictions.

What we've also seen, is how no-cause evictions are often used as a tool to discriminate against survivors. It's not uncommon for survivors of domestic or relationship violence to lose their housing due to crimes that were committed against them. In these instances, survivors are

displaced because of no-cause evictions and rent increases and are made more vulnerable to perpetrators of abuse or assault. When survivors of violence have safety and housing stability, they can begin to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children. Here we see the link between housing instability, domestic violence, and houselessness, and this bill is an important step in breaking that link.

In closing, we are asking that you support SB 608 to prevent unjust no-cause evictions and to protect against severe rent spikes that inevitably punish survivors. People deserve safe, stable, and affordable housing and SB 608 would be the first step in gaining that. As professional staff working on behalf of students and survivors, we know the important work that you've done specifically with bills like SB 1562 to help protect survivors. We have faith that you will continue to protect the most vulnerable once again.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alisha Howard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alisha Howard, Sexual & Relationship Violence Response Coordinator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sydney Bernkopf". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sydney Bernkopf, Sexual & Relationship Violence Response Advocate