

**From:** [Anthony Bencivengo](#)  
**To:** [Exhibits SHOUS](#)  
**Subject:** Testimony for SB 970  
**Date:** Monday, March 25, 2019 2:06:52 PM

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To the Senate Committee on Housing

RE: Support for SB 970

Dear Senators,

Stopping discrimination against cannabis users is a tenants rights issue and a racial justice issue.

Even with recreational cannabis now legalized, there are nearly 35,000 registered medical cannabis patients across Oregon (1) who need the ability to use medicinal cannabis to cope with what would otherwise be unbearable pain or anxiety. Medicinal cannabis users already face enough barriers due to their conditions, and do not deserve to face added barriers when applying for housing. SB 970 is a needed step towards ensuring tenants with medical conditions can secure the housing they need to maintain and improve their physical and mental health. In this vein, I would argue that SB 970 should be strengthened by also mandating that landlords may not consider past evictions over cannabis possession or use.

Continuing to allow landlords to reject applicants due to past cannabis convictions worsens the systemic racism of the War on Drugs and exacerbates Oregon's ongoing problems with racial discrimination in housing. Even though cannabis use is found to be equally prevalent amongst people of all races, black cannabis users are 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for it than white cannabis users (2). Even in states where recreational cannabis use is legal, cannabis users who are arrested remain disproportionately black (3). Legal scholar Michelle Alexander famously calls the system of social barriers placed on people with drug convictions "The New Jim Crow" because of its disproportionate impact on people of color. This is as true in rental housing as in any other area. SB 970 would offer needed protection against housing discrimination for tenants with cannabis possession convictions, and help more tenants - particularly tenants of color - to access stable housing.

I hope you will support SB 970, and continue to work to end the racist War on Drugs.

Thank you,

Anthony Bencivengo  
Portland Tenants United\*

\*Organizational affiliation is mentioned for identification purposes only

(1) <https://www.oregonlive.com/marijuana/2018/11/oregpm.html>

(2)

<https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-justice/sentencing-reform/war-marijuana-black-and-white>

(3)

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/1/29/16936908/marijuana-legalization-racial-disparities-arrests>

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