

Chair Williamson, Vice Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Pam Phan and I am the Policy and Organizing Director of the Community Alliance of Tenants. CAT is Oregon's only statewide tenant-led organization, with more than 5000 members throughout Oregon. In addition to creating opportunities to influence public decisions that impact their lives, CAT also operates a statewide Renters Rights Hotline, currently servicing more than 2500 callers a year to support mainly low-income renters as they navigate a hostile rental market. Our members and leaders are predominantly people of color, low-wage workers, families with children, people living with disabilities, seniors, and immigrants and refugees. CAT is building a strong housing justice movement that is led and directed by: low-income renters, who are most impacted by Oregon's historic lack of access to housing and the current housing crisis.

Community Alliance of Tenants is also a proud member of the Fair Shot for All Coalition. The Fair Shot For All Coalition is a unique partnership of over 30 community based organizations and labor unions who came together in 2014 to advance racial, gender, and economic justice by fixing the broken policies that prevent women, people of color, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ people and working and low income Oregonians from getting a fair shot.

At CAT we hear daily about the challenges that our members face when seeking or maintaining their housing. A significant barrier to safe and stable housing is at the intersection with the criminal justice system. Many of the same systemic and institutional biases inherent in the way we obtain housing are mirrored and further exacerbated in our policing and court systems, and some cases even more draconian. Which is why we are here today, to show our full support HB 3145 and reforms that can lead us to equal access to justice for all Oregonians.

Housing stability begins with equal access and fair protections under the law. Unfortunately we know that in practice in the lives of many of our members, particularly those who are Black or brown, this is untrue. For many of our members gaining access to housing is the first of many barriers. Even if their offense is for a non-violent crime that is years old and they have served their time, this can have a lasting effect on their ability to gain housing. A landlord can deny you housing, no matter how far back the conviction. You simply get screened out. While we work with partners such as the Urban League to address the root causes of such discriminatory screening practices, on the other front HB 3145 is an opportunity to address the disproportionate number of people of color coming through the judicial system.

For Oregonians who experience homelessness, lack of adequate legal representation contributes to a spiral of instability. We know that those in our community who live without a home, or those that come in contact with law enforcement much more frequently, experience more arrests. It can be difficult to gain stability, housing and steady work, and our members are more likely to be on the street, couch surfing, or doubling up with family or friends. People who experience homelessness are often brought into the criminal justice system for small offenses such as resting in public spaces. [In 2017, the 3% of Portland residents without housing accounted for 52% of arrests. Of those arrests, 84% were for nonviolent offenses.](#) And in fact, many people leave jail and go directly to shelters when space is available.

We believe with better access to quality legal representation for some of these convictions and provide an opportunity for stability that all people in Oregon deserve. Under HB 3145 many tenants, who are among low-income Oregonians, will have better representation in the courtroom and a better chance at finding stability in housing and other areas of their lives. We are glad to see that in addition to manageable caseloads, training, and accountability measures it also includes better access to wrap around services such as social workers

which can reduce recidivism and make significant difference in the lives of low-income Oregonians who need stable housing.

Thank you for your time and we urge a yes vote on this bill.