

April 24, 2019
Hearing in House Rules Committee
HB 2006 - In Favor
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In Southern Oregon, a woman who will remain nameless for confidentiality sake informed us that her and several other of her tenants were very concerned. They reached out to a CAT staff member concerned about not having a working elevator. See, the problem here was that many people in this building were seniors with disabilities and it was not an assisted living facility. Some of these tenants had been stuck in their apartment for days, unable to leave. I was informed after a few weeks of engagement with tenants in this building that one of the neighbors had attempted to take the stairs, an elderly woman. She had suffered a heart attack climbing the stairs. We worked with these tenants to collectively write a letter requesting immediate repair to the elevators and other issues in this apartment complex.

Still another family in North Portland, informed one of our organizers that after dealing with radon exposure above the legal safe limit, pest infestation, and moldy conditions, the tenant had finally approached their landlord for needed repairs and was told by that landlord that they were going to call ICE on them and that they were ungrateful. This was prior to SB608, the landlord attempted a no cause eviction that was thwarted that's to CAT's support through our Safe Housing Project.

Most recently, while observing one of our hotline shifts, I listened as a hotline specialist spoke with a tenant who had been told by their landlord that they needed to vacate in short order (much less than the 30 day minimum), and the tenant was confused about whether they qualified for relocation assistance. We coached them that the law states notices should be at least 30 days if they've lived there less than a year and 60 if they lived there longer than a year (this was prior to SB608, and out of the city of Portland) and that relocation assistance is a law that provides support for tenants in Portland, and no other states at this time.

When SB608 passed, I was contacted by one of our leaders who was given a 28% rent increase notice on the day the bill was signed. She would have likely been displaced from her home. We encouraged to write a letter about the new bill to her landlord. That rent increase was rescinded and she never contacted an attorney for support.

CAT has supported over 60,000 renters navigating a decades old housing crisis not just in the lack of affordable housing we have in Oregon, but also the lack of quality and safe housing that is free from harassment, in working order, and safe from environmental hazards. We educate renters on their rights and responsibilities under Oregon landlord tenant law, at no charge. We've done this for the last 23 years and in the last five years, the volume of support needed has increased exponentially. Two weeks ago, I pulled the stats of our incoming call volume and we are averaging an estimated incoming call volume of 26,000 calls per year from 25 different counties in Oregon. We receive referrals from agencies like 211, Fair Housing Council of

Oregon, social service agencies, culturally specific organizations, affordable housing providers, housing placement agencies, domestic violence shelters, city and county agencies, and much more. With our current capacity however, we are only able to support up to two to three thousand of the incoming call volume from 10 of the 25 different counties.

Issues we hear about on our hotline cover many different kinds of issues like deposit disputes, rent payment negotiations, pest infestation, mold exposure, environmental hazards, harassment, unfair evictions, discrimination, screening and security deposit barriers, and desperately needed repairs. Many of the people who call our hotline do not have access to legal supports both because they don't know where to go to get the services and because they cannot afford the services. So CAT ends up being an intermediate step for thousands of people to be able to receive tailored information to their rental situation and become equipped to SELF-ADVOCATE on their own behalf. If during our triage and support, it is determined that legal expertise and/or representation is necessary - then we can connect people with referrals to attorney supports. In some jurisdictions, this could even be a private attorney whom we've previously paid for low income tenants to receive free legal consultation up to 3 hours, and representation on their behalf.

As a future applicant to the RFP process that will follow this allocation of dollars, These rental market services resources will go to replicating these tried and true methods that have kept people off the streets, kept families in their homes, remedied unsafe living conditions, and connected people to vital services that are otherwise scarce, expensive and hard to find - especially for our target population of low income families with children, seniors, people with disabilities, communities of color, families escaping domestic violence, and immigrant and refugee families. We are asking for full funding of this rental market resources package to expand this work and keep more families off the streets and working to self-advocate for safer and more stable living conditions.

Just as much as we need supply, we need families to have an opportunity to be able to enter, keep, and maintain safe and stable housing. And our work has demonstrated in many cases that this kind of education and outreach can support families in keeping a roof over their heads and avoiding living on the streets.