

From the Desk of
Kim Thatcher

Opinion: Tenants rights bill would protect harassers

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In this Nov. 10, 2015, file photo, apartments for rent are shown in Portland.

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By [Guest Columnist](#)

By: Melodie Atkinson

Melodie Atkinson manages two large multi-family properties in Salem.

Today, more than 40 years after passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, harassment continues to degrade safe living environments for Oregonians.

I grew up in less than popular neighborhoods. I have seen neighborhood violence and felt the struggle to find “somewhere else” – suitable housing where we could sleep soundly at night. My single, working-poor grandmother raised me after I left the foster care system. She made too much for public assistance, but not near enough to raise a family. I recognize the hardships of housing barriers and have spent my career dedicated to helping people from all walks of life find safe and comfortable places to call home.

As a property manager, my guiding principle is to protect residents. The Fair Housing Act and other federal and state laws require me to maintain a harassment-free environment on my properties. But [Senate Bill 608](#), while optimistically intended to protect Oregon’s renters, will have the opposite effect.

A provision in the bill would ban “no-cause notices” after 12 months of tenancy. Such notices occur when a landlord alerts a tenant on a month-to-month lease that he or she must vacate a unit. Taking away landlords’ ability to issue these no-cause notices

removes a valuable tool in protecting other tenants from one who has been harassing them or engaging in behavior that falls short of a for-cause eviction. The bill essentially sanctions harassment and can create a hostile environment for the residents. Under current law, residents are better protected, and bad actors creating a hostile environment are given ample time to make alternative arrangements.

A no-cause notice also allows property managers to protect the privacy of victims and reduce the potential for retaliation. There is no worse injustice than seeking help and then being subjected to further mistreatment and intimidation. For-cause notices must detail the spiteful yet less than illegal behavior, silencing renters who may be fearful of coming forward. Bullying happens everywhere, and when the bully is your neighbor, there is no escape.

The expenses of moving to escape a malicious neighbor disproportionately hurts renters with lower incomes, those with disabilities, and especially those with children. The populations that lack the financial resources necessary to move are restricted and cannot rebound from the negative impact of a neighbor who perpetuates a harassing environment. Residents with limited resources will be held hostage in their own homes – unable to escape an environment that would otherwise be remedied.

Why are we rewarding harassment and intimidation? Why should a good neighbor be forced to move instead of a bad one? Why is my right to advocate for my residents being stripped away?

Disparate impact is the unintentional application of a facially neutral standard that disproportionately affects a specific group. The removal of no-cause notices as a tool to protect renters from hateful behavior will have dire consequences.

If the right to evict those who harm their neighbors is restricted, it will become much more difficult for Oregonians to protect residents from those who violate others' rights and inflict emotional and/or physical damage to people and property. My career in property management, connected to my life experience, provides me a unique perspective to Oregon's housing challenges. Restricting the right to protect tenants is not a real solution. I am urging lawmakers to hear the voices of people asking them to slow down when crafting these overhauling, dangerous regulations.