



HOUSING ALLIANCE

December 17, 2020

Joint Interim Committee on the Third Special Session
Oregon Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chair Courtney, Co-Chair Kotek, Co-Vice-Chair Girod, Co-Vice-Chair Drazan, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance to express our support for LC 18, and to urge its passage. COVID-19 continues to negatively impact our communities, particularly for people with low incomes who may have lost work or income due to the virus. We are here today to speak in strong support of renewing the eviction moratorium and providing critical rental assistance for the hundreds of thousands of Oregonians who rent their home and are at risk of eviction.

The Oregon Housing Alliance is a coalition of ninety organizations from all parts of the state, including non-profit housing developers, residents of affordable housing, local jurisdictions, and organizations working to meet basic needs in every corner of our state. The Housing Alliance believes that all Oregonians deserve a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home.

We are deeply concerned that, without further action by the State Legislature, evictions would begin as soon as the Governor's current moratorium¹ expires at the end of this year, leaving many Oregonians to grapple with mounting debt and homelessness.

As COVID cases are significant, and winter sets in, this is not the time to let protections expire. A continuation of this fundamental protection for Oregonians most impacted by this pandemic is needed now more than ever.

The pandemic has lifted up countless stories of people who are making extreme sacrifices to pay rent and remain in their homes. The latest Census Household Pulse Survey² data reports that:

- Two thirds (66%) of respondents reported being worried about being evicted within the next two months;

¹ https://www.oregon.gov/gov/Documents/executive_orders/eo_20-56.pdf;
<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2020S1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB4213/Enrolled>

² <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp20.html>

- More than one in four (28%) reported either no or slight confidence in their ability to pay next month's rent;
- 26% of respondents reported using credit cards to meet basic needs.
- 26% of respondents reported borrowing money from family or friends to meet basic needs.
- 37% of respondents reported selling belongings or spending down savings to meet basic needs.

Stories in the news media over the last two weeks have shared incredibly difficult stories of families selling cars, skipping meals, and making other sacrifices in order to pay their rent. This is not uncommon and it is critical that we make public policy decisions to protect people in their homes.

Families of color have been particularly hard hit by COVID – both the impacts of job loss and the virus – due to systemic racism which has kept many in low wage jobs, or a legacy of environmental impacts which negatively affect their health. Recent research³ by Portland State University reflects that people of color are more likely to owe back rent.

National data from Stout Research⁴ shows that renters who owe back rent owe an average of \$2700 – which could be solved through rent assistance, but for someone who has lost their job, this may feel insurmountable. As COVID cases rise and as more Oregonians opt to stay home rather than go out, or lose work again for those in service-sector jobs, it is not unreasonable to predict that more Oregonians will begin to fall behind. With federal unemployment benefits expiring for many at the end of December, we urge you to act to provide basic stability to our neighbors across Oregon who are making these tough choices between paying rent and putting food on the table.

The Stout Research data⁵ also estimates that the current rent shortfall for Oregon renters is between \$126 million and \$222 million. This data is updated every two weeks, and has a complex methodology that pulls in data from a variety of sources. It is the best data we have seen which estimates current rent arrears, and the \$200 million contemplated in LC 18 would be significant in erasing these arrears.

Recent research by public health experts⁶ also shows how evictions can and will negatively impact our COVID cases in Oregon. First, the threat of eviction can increase stress, anxiety, and depression, thereby weakening people's immune systems. Families spend down savings and assets and put rent on credit cards in order to avoid eviction. When this becomes unsustainable or people run out of any assets, they may next turn to move in with family or friends. With COVID, this creates an overcrowded housing situation, and circumstances which can worsen the spread of the virus. Homelessness and housing instability exacerbate the spread of COVID. Again, these evictions will disproportionately impact communities of color, who rent in higher

³ <https://www.pdx.edu/homelessness/housing-insecurity-report>

⁴ <https://www.ncsha.org/resource/current-and-expected-rental-shortfall-and-potential-eviction-filings/>

⁵ <https://www.ncsha.org/resource/stout-rental-and-eviction-live-data/>

⁶ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3736457

percentages than their white counterparts due to historic housing discrimination and other factors.

An eviction moratorium has many implications. Families will have a roof over their heads as the weather gets colder. Children will be able to do homework at home, not in a parking lot. And the Legislature can limit their crises instead of creating an even larger houselessness crisis. As the State Legislature considers other measures to curb the growth of COVID in Oregon and to deliver much-needed housing assistance to Oregonians, we cannot emulate other states who have decided to lift their eviction moratoriums and suffer unfortunate, predictable, and preventable results.

The basic protection of keeping people in their homes is so critical to preventing a homelessness crisis of enormous proportion, and further spread of COVID.

As you have previously heard from testimony from the Housing Alliance, the state eviction moratorium simply delays the requirement to pay. These rent bills still come due as the moratorium ends. We are thrilled to see a commitment of \$200 million which will offer significant relief to impacted Oregonians.

As a member of the workgroup convened by Representative Fahey, I would love to share my perspective on that workgroup and the significant work we accomplished over the last six months. We began meeting at the end of July, and met weekly for several hours at a time, essentially designing a new landlord based rent assistance model, as is contemplated in LC 18, and discussing how we can maintain housing stability.

The workgroup looked at models in other states. We researched best practices, and we considered many perspectives, and ultimately, it felt to me, as someone who would consider herself an advocate for tenants, as if we found compromise. Certainly the requirement for attestation within LC 18 is a concern from our perspective. We worry about people who may not understand their rights or be concerned about signing the attestation, along with concerns over people who may not speak English as their first language who may not be able to access the form in their native language.

Previous to the pandemic, and in the first round of rent assistance provided through the Coronavirus Relief Fund, our rent assistance systems are delivered through a network of Community Action agencies and their partners across Oregon. Those systems require the tenant to apply for assistance, and are typically able to serve at best one of every ten households that need help. As a point of reference, in the 2019-21 biennium, the Legislature provided \$50 million in general fund for rent and shelter assistance. In June, 2020, the Legislature asked this network to spend \$55 million of Coronavirus Relief Funds in a short six months. And the system responded and delivered. Tenants across the state received assistance, and Community Action agencies did an incredible amount of work to deliver resources and support people.

Landlord members of the workgroup strongly urged that the Legislature consider a model where landlords could apply on behalf of all of their tenants who are in arrears. The landlord compensation fund as contemplated in LC 18 could provide some additional efficiency, and support landlords to quickly receive assistance on behalf of all their tenants.

The fund would prioritize smaller landlords, but it would not exclude any landlord from receiving resources for current tenants who are behind on arrears. The compensation fund allows the landlord to apply for all of their tenants in one application.

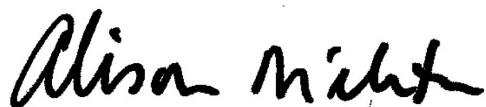
LC 18 also contemplates putting one fourth of funds into the existing Community Action agency system, and would allow tenants to continue to apply for assistance. Community Action agencies also have the ability to prioritize people most in need, and may choose to prioritize people who continue to need assistance paying their rent, rather than tenants who only need help in paying any rent arrears.

We urge the Legislature to pass LC 18 to provide significant rental assistance, paired with an extension of the eviction moratorium. Assistance will support both landlords and tenants and will help solve the problems many of our neighbors are facing as they continue to struggle with lost jobs and income, heightened risk due to COVID, and concern over whether they'll be able to stay in their home.

In closing, we reiterate that households are making tough choices to continue paying rent. No one should be evicted because of a pandemic, and we must both continue to protect households through preventing evictions as well as providing rental assistance.

Thank you very much for your time, and for your service to our state during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison McIntosh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alison McIntosh
On Behalf of the Oregon Housing Alliance

Housing Alliance Members

1000 Friends of Oregon
211info
Aging in the Gorge
Benton Habitat for Humanity
Bienestar
Bradley Angle
BRIDGE Housing
Business for a Better Portland
CASA of Oregon
Chrisman Development
Central City Concern
Children First for Oregon
Church Women United of Lane County
City of Beaverton
City of Eugene
City of Forest Grove
City of Hillsboro
City of Portland
City of Tigard
Clackamas County
Coalition of Community Health Clinics
Coalition of Housing Advocates
College Housing Northwest
Community Action Partnership of Oregon
Community Action Team
Community Alliance of Tenants
Community Development Partners
Community Housing Fund
Community Partners for Affordable Housing
Community Vision
Cornerstone Community Housing
DevNW
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Enhabit
Enterprise Community Partners
Fair Housing Council of Oregon
Farmworker Housing Development Corp.
FOOD for Lane County
Habitat for Humanity of Oregon
Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East
Hacienda CDC
Housing Authorities of Oregon
Housing Authority of Clackamas County
Housing Development Center
Housing Oregon
Human Solutions
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
Impact Northwest
Innovative Housing, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance on Poverty
JOIN
Lane County Health and Human Services
League of Oregon Cities
League of Women Voters of Oregon
Lincoln County
Looking Glass Community Services
Mainstream Housing Inc.
Metro
Mid-Columbia Housing Authority
NAYA Family Center
Neighborhood Partnerships
NeighborImpact
NeighborWorks Umpqua
Network for Oregon Affordable Housing
Northwest Housing Alternatives
Northwest Pilot Project
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
Oregon Coalition of Christian Voices
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Oregon Coalition on Housing & Homelessness
Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities
Oregon Food Bank
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Proud Ground
Raphael House
REACH CDC
Residents Organizing for Change (ROC) Oregon
Rogue Action Center
Rose CDC
St. Francis Shelter
St. Vincent de Paul of Lane County, Inc.
ShelterCare
Sisters Habitat for Humanity
Sponsors, Inc.
SquareOne Villages
Street Roots
Think Real Estate
Transition Projects
Washington County
Welcome Home Coalition