

Co-Chairs President Courtney & Speaker Tina Kotek, Co-Vice Chairs Sen. Girod and Rep. Drazen, and members of the committee,

Re: Support for LC 18, extending eviction moratorium and the rental assistance program.

For the record, my name is Emilie Azorr and I am here on behalf of Clackamas Women's Services. Clackamas Women's Services serves survivors of domestic and sexual violence in Clackamas County, providing support to hundreds of survivors and their families each year. I'm a direct service advocate, which means I have the privilege of working with survivors and their families one-on-one. I support survivors with plans to keep them safe, I work with our wonderful community partners in Clackamas County to get survivors connected to wrap around services, and I have the joy of making someone's world feel a little bit bigger when the violence they've experienced makes it feel so small. I am here today because I know firsthand how important it is for our legislature to extend the eviction moratorium to support all domestic and sexual violence survivors in the State of Oregon.

I've been honored to serve survivors for the last 3 years, but right now it's hard for me to remember what it was like to be an advocate before the pandemic hit. It's hard for me to imagine a time when the survivors I serve were not calling our agency wondering how they were going to pay their rent. It's hard to remember a time when I was not focused on keeping survivors safe from abuse and safe from an inevitable eviction. So many survivors I've worked with have finally found safety in their living situations after years of harm and their home is not only a symbol of independence and self-sufficiency, but a symbol of freedom from abuse. The joy that survivors have experienced from securing safe and stable housing with the help of our agency is now gone, replaced by the fear of eviction and loss of safety. If survivors are evicted from their safe and stable housing, their only option may be to return to their abuser, who can provide them with shelter and financial safety during an uncertain crisis. We know that if a survivor returns to an abuser, their chances of leaving again go down and the risk factor for leaving goes up. It is essential that we keep survivors in their safe and stable living situations by extending the eviction moratorium to ensure they are able to continue their lives free from abuse.

Our agency also supports survivors who are still in their relationships or situations where they may be experiencing harm. These survivors are facing particularly complex circumstances as a result of the pandemic. Survivors who are still in their abusive relationships may be experiencing more episodes of harm, increased risk of lethal harm, and the resources and harm reduction techniques that they've used in the past may not be available anymore. These survivors may also be experiencing financial abuse from their partner and there may be consequences for them if the moratorium is not extended. Abusers may force the survivor to put leases in their names, making them financially liable for all expenses. These survivors may not have the financial resources to have stayed up to date on rent as they may be the only financial provider. Other survivors may share a lease with an abuser, but an abuser is not allowing them to pay any rent or they are not allowed to find work or financial resources. If an abusive partner has not been paying rent and has refused to allow a survivor to contribute, the survivor may end up being liable for thousands of dollars at the end of the moratorium in back owed rent. Our advocates need more time to work with these incredibly resilient survivors to come up with a plan to keep them safe and explore what options they have to not be financially liable for their abuser's harm. This may be coming up with a plan to leave or exploring ways to safely remain in a relationship and pay off any back owed rent. But we cannot do this if the moratorium ends on December 31st.

Our State has incredibly domestic and sexual violence advocates working tirelessly throughout this pandemic to support survivors of abuse. Clackamas Women's Services is one of many agencies doing vital work across the State to keep survivors housed in this pandemic and I am humbled to be a witness to the resilience and strength I see in our survivors every day. I am grateful to you all for taking up this bill because it is essential to the safety of our survivors throughout the State. COVID has been devastating to families everywhere, and our survivors aren't immune from this. As someone who is working silently and fiercely to support survivors, I urge to please support this bill. Your advocates and domestic and sexual violence agencies are depending on all of you to voice your support for survivors by passing this bill.