



Oregon AFSCME Supports LC 18

Dear Co-Chairs President Courtney and Speaker Kotek, Vice Chairs Drazan and Girod and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LC 18- the bill to extend the evictions moratorium and provide financial assistance for landlords and renters. Oregon AFSCME represents around 24,000 employees in the state in the private and public sectors. Included in this count are our members who work for various housing authorities, and other human services and behavioral health people who work to connect people to housing and supports that help keep them housed.

Two of our members, Jackson and Kevin, from Home Forward and Homes for Good have submitted written testimony and you'll hear from Jackson who is also a landlord during verbal testimony.

Like many of us, I haven't left my neighborhood much since March, but even in the much smaller amount of the world I see on a daily basis, I know that the current evictions moratorium hasn't kept everyone housed. In my neighborhood, the encampments that existed before COVID have grown and more have popped up as well.

The investment LC 18 makes to keep people housed and provide financial stability is a small cost to provide much more stability for our state's public safety, public health and human services and helps keep people from intersecting, sometimes in detrimental ways with those other services.

In public health, many have pointed to COVID as that is the largest danger we face, but for people who are living on the streets, they also face increased risks from other communicable disease and bacterial outbreaks because of the lack of access to plumbing and running water. They risk other health impacts – physical, mental and behavioral that only become more difficult and expensive to treat. These systems are all struggling to meet the current demands.

I would like to recall testimony from Charlie Peirson, an AFSCME member in public defense who provided this support for SB 608 that still rings true:

“...getting evicted or priced out of your home doesn't always mean police contact or criminal charges. That said, the Oregonian reported that in 2017, the 3% of Portland residents without houses accounted for 52% of arrests and 84% of those arrests were for nonviolent offenses. I represent hundreds of people each year who have no stable, legal place to sleep, bathe, or live their lives as we do behind closed doors. The loss of housing disrupts the basic patterns of a healthy, prosocial life, and can turn everyday private struggles into public problems.

Homeless people get arrested for trespassing, often because of where they sleep or because they got on public transportation without fare too many times. They get arrested for drinking in



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parks or for having an open beer can on a sidewalk, shouting in public, or putting up a tent in the wrong place. "Tumultuous behavior," shoplifting, and shoving matches. I've seen people arrested for protecting their property, for having the drugs they take to stay awake at night, and for answering nature's call. They get arrested for being a nuisance. I recently heard a Portland police officer say that if they come talk to a person three times "you're getting arrested."

Most of my homeless clients eventually miss a court date. They oversleep. They get injured, they get sick, they have loved ones whose welfare comes first. Often, the safest place they can sleep is far from the courthouse. Court documents get stolen, lost, or ruined by rain. A missed court date means another arrest. The average stay, the Sheriff says, is 10 to 15 days.

Homeless people get arrested for things that wouldn't happen if they had a home. They get arrested for things they'd have a right to do in their own home. They get arrested because they are messy and their messes are upsetting. They make us uncomfortable.

A home is more than just a legal place to sleep. It's a refuge. It's a place where we can keep ourselves and our lives in order and a place where we can shut the door when we need to be messy. Home is where we recover. To put it simply, housing instability creates petty crimes and unnecessary arrests and makes it harder to move through the criminal justice system smoothly."

As I have said in testimony in support of bills expanding behavioral health, mental health and reforming public defense, if the inhumanity of knowing that not investing in these services and protections puts many in a cycle of houselessness, increased trauma, and intersections with the criminal justice system doesn't move you, maybe the costs across our systems will.

Oregon AFSCME urges you to pass the renter moratorium and the assistance program in LC 18 to keep people housed because everyone has a right to feel safe and stable, especially when there is so much turmoil in the world.

In Unity,

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