

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 Matilda Brown. I am writing on behalf of Stroll PDX: we serve low income and unhoused people who have experience in the sex trades and/or who are at risk of sexual exploitation. Thank you for taking up LC 18! We strongly support this bill - it is essential for the health and well being of the people we serve, and to ensure that the population we serve does not expand exponentially in the next few months: we **must** avoid a wave of displacement and homelessness in our state that we already have little ability to deal with. The coming wave of evictions will have a devastating impact on families and individuals, and it will undeniably force vulnerable people, particularly mothers, into the position of trading sex for shelter and other necessities.

We know that the COVID 19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence: its effects on survivors of sexual exploitation have yet to be researched but the numbers of desperate women we interact with seeking help—that simply doesn't exist—breaks my heart every week. Last month a woman at a houseless camp in Portland approached me because she needed help leaving the area: her abusive ex was looking for her and had stated his intent to kill her. She had already lost housing earlier in the pandemic, and was sharing a tent with a friend. We called Call to Safety together to hear the expected answer: there are no funds. Shelter space is waitlisted for years.

We know that Portland, like many cities around the country, has reduced shelter space to comply with social distancing. This reduction in beds has yet to be made up. For people who very reasonably do not want to risk sleeping on the street, their options have been drastically reduced. Stay with an abuser and stay sheltered or—?

So many people, faced with no other options, are turning to the sex trades. People already in the sex trades have seen their ability to work safely reduced with the closures of strip clubs, and are suddenly competing with an influx of inexperienced and vulnerable newcomers for a finite pool of clients, most of whom are not practising basic social hygiene, some of whom are taking advantage of people's desperation to push for unsafe practises, or to actively harm people.

People in the camps are doing their best to stay safe, but living conditions in Portland's houseless camps are barbaric. Thousands of people in Portland lack access to running water, toilets—basic sanitation! as well as food and heat. Children live in these conditions.

What are parents to do?

The people who have hung on this long are to be commended, although it's down as much to luck at this point as anything else. They deserve to stay housed. The people who haven't, who have lost housing this year or lost it years ago and have busy to make it to the top of the waitlists, deserve to be housed.

On a sheerly practical level, Portland cannot afford to force people to live like this. It's a public health hazard with a massive cost.

Thank you for your consideration.

Matilda Brown