

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

I am a resident of Bend and a newly elected Bend City Councilor, taking office on January 6. I am also a former prosecutor and victims' rights attorney with extensive experience working directly with survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

First, I am writing to convey my personal support for the legislative concept that will extend the eviction moratorium and rent assistance. This extension will especially be of great help to survivors whose experience of housing insecurity due to their victimization has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It's so important for all of Oregon that we prevent a wave of displacement and homelessness by acting now to extend the eviction moratorium.

Tragically, the pandemic has increased incidences of domestic violence even while shelter space is less available due to social distancing restrictions. I cannot tell you how many survivors I have worked with who felt pressure to stay in an abusive relationship because of the lack of available housing options for them and their children. And the intersection of housing insecurity and COVID with our communities of color must be taken into account. Black and Brown Oregonians are at the greatest risk of lifelong harm from the COVID evictions. Discriminatory housing policies have made homeownership difficult and inaccessible, leaving people of color at higher risk of rental evictions even as higher rates of COVID exposure are leaving people ill and economically stressed. For example, according to the U.S. Census Pulse Survey, 30% of Black renters are at risk of eviction because of concerns they can't pay next month's rent.

Bend is experiencing an acute shortage of housing for our residents, especially housing that is affordable to our most vulnerable residents and neighbors experiencing houselessness. I believe the Legislature must act now to move LC 18 and the supporting funding forward to prevent further devastating harm to Oregonians, especially to survivors and our communities of color.

Second, I write to convey my personal support for allowing restaurants to sell mixed drinks to go. I fully support and understand the need to impose restrictions on restaurants and bars in order to slow the spread of COVID-19. We must also acknowledge the devastating effect this pandemic has had on our local businesses, and look for creative ways to allow them to operate safely through the winter. In Central Oregon, winter weather may not be as conducive to outdoor dining as in other places in the state. Providing more to-go flexibility and options is one way to help our restaurants and bars survive until it is safe to open indoor dining again. Please move LC 10 forward swiftly.

Thank you for your work on this important Special Session.

The above testimony is on my own behalf and does not reflect any opinion of other Councilors-Elect or current Bend City Councilors.

Sincerely,
Melanie Kebler, Bend resident
Councilor-Elect, Bend City Council Position 1