

December 10, 2021

Oregon House Committee on Housing

Re: Support of LC 9

Dear Co-Chairs Beyer, Fahey; Co-Vice Chairs Knopp and Wallan

Do not let Oregon's statewide housing crisis get worse.

In the 2021 session, SB 278 passed with broad bipartisan support so that individuals and families wouldn't be evicted while they waited for state and federal rent assistance to get to the landlord. Due to overwhelming demand, statutory changes are necessary to implement that goal. The government has promised relief to thousands of households, and we need to ensure that promise is kept.

On behalf of Project Access NOW (PANOW), I write to **urge your support of LC 9**. PANOW is a non-profit in the tri-county area with a mission to improve our communities' health and well-being by creating access to care, services, and resources for those most in need. We offer a suite of programs promoting access to care and social services, regardless of an individual's insurance status or type.

We urge passage of the following:

- Provide new funding for continuing access to rent assistance for tenants with low-income through the winter months until new federal resources are available, and for the landlord guarantee fund.
- Modify SB 278's safe harbor period to cover the entire application period, and extend the sunset on protections. Tenants who have applied for assistance should be protected until their application has been considered, and either granted or denied, no matter when they apply.
- Extend the sunset on the current 10-day (as opposed to 72 hour) notice period for nonpayment evictions, coupled with updated notice to tenants about eviction process and where to find rent assistance. This is a common-sense provision that works to facilitate access to available resources designed to prevent displacement.
- Expand and extend the current 60-day landlord guarantee fund to cover any period of time (not just 60 days) if a landlord delays eviction and a tenant is ultimately denied assistance or receives less than is owed when the case is closed. This removes risk for the landlord in ensuring tenant stability and access to assistance.

No one should be evicted for nonpayment while their rent assistance application is being processed. We must act now to prevent the unnecessary and tragic generational harm that comes from eviction and displacement.

Background information to support the case:

The economic reality for low-income Oregonians:

- More than 7,900 low-income households who have applied for assistance to maintain their housing stability and pay off rent debt that accrued during the financial crisis of the pandemic have been waiting so long, their safe harbor period has expired and they have no legal protection from eviction.
- More than 24,000 other households are also in the queue, getting closer to their expiration dates every day.
- Since the start of the safe harbor protections in SB 278, nearly 2,300 nonpayment evictions have been filed in Oregon courts. These evictions increase the risk of homelessness and cause generational harm to families and individuals.
- Oregon's Black, Indigenous, and communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID pandemic, and have needed to seek rent assistance at higher rates, and are at greater risk of eviction.
- U.S. Census Household PULSE data indicates that more than 67,000 Oregon households are experiencing housing instability due to inability to pay rent.
- Even before the pandemic, 1 in 4 Oregonians paid 50% or more of income for rent.
- More than half of Oregon jobs pay less than survival wages for a parent and child before the pandemic and wage increases since then are offset by inflation.
- Many low-income households had to borrow or use credit cards just to stay afloat even if they are working, leaving deep debt loads to pay off with low wages.
- Oregon has the third highest rate of unsheltered youth in the country and local shelters are straining at the seams.
- Oregonians' financial worries are growing statewide despite falling unemployment rates.

No one should be evicted for non-payment while rent assistance is on the way. We must ensure continued access to rent assistance in the coming months, and we must act to prevent the generational harm caused by displacement while payments are being made.

Best,
Dele Oyemaja