



Joint Interim Committee on the Second Special Session of 2021  
900 Court St. NE, Room 453, Salem, OR 97301

December 10, 2021

To the Honorable Chairs and Members of the Joint Interim Committee,

Evictions for nonpayment have skyrocketed across the state while there is a backlog of rent assistance, and the state rent assistance has been shut down due to overwhelming need. Those evictions are both tragic and preventable the Urban League of Portland is urging this body to take swift action during the special session on December 13th.

In the 2021 session, SB 278 passed with broad bipartisan support so that individuals and families would not 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. Thousands and thousands of renting households have been waiting for rent assistance for two months, three months, or longer and based on application data we know BIPOC Oregonians are disproportionately affected. Compound this with the fact that Oregon's BIPOC communities have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID pandemic – have needed to seek rent assistance at higher rates – our communities are facing a crisis as we head into the winter months.

The current system as it exists has some built-in barriers to access that will need to be addressed. Current prioritization favors people for whom the pandemic has had a short-term impact on their stability, while those most impacted by the pandemic were struggling prior to COVID. For those individuals that operate outside of the mainstream economy, proving how you and your family have been impacted by COVID can be difficult to demonstrate. For example, wage workers can show a reduction in wages, but people who got by with the support of family, gig workers, and others who have been excluded from the mainstream economy, and similarly impacted individuals struggle to prove a reduction in income and are prioritized for support.

Additionally, technology has been a barrier to access in that by nature the system excludes people at the highest risk – people with low computer literacy or lack of internet access; we had clients who struggled to upload related documents such as pay stubs and copies of their identification. Our clients would struggle to get copies of documents if their household was multigeneration or just several adults, more common in BIPOC communities, and the amount of documentation is often duplicated. Property owners who are not professional landlords also struggled to produce ledgers that outlined expenses. Once information is submitted, what we have heard from our



community is that no one on the other end will provide updates or assurance about the completed application. This of course is stressful.

If we do not provide new funding for continuing access to rent assistance for tenants with low-income, through the winter months until new federal resources are available, we will not avert this disaster.

Additionally, we are calling for the modification of 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. It is imperative that we 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 the 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. And lastly, we must 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.

**The government has promised relief to thousands of households, and we need to ensure that promise is kept.** Oregonians are counting on you.

Respectfully,

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