



12/10/2021

**To: Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Fahey, Co-Vice Chair Knopp, Co-Vice Chair Wallan,  
Members of the Committee**  
**From: Oregon Health Equity Alliance**

**Re: Testimony in support of the rental assistance policy in LC 9**

Greetings Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Fahey, Co-Vice Chair Knopp, Co-Vice Chair Wallan, Members of the Committee. I am writing to you on behalf of the Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA), in support of the rental assistance policy in LC 9.

Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA) is one of six Regional Health Equity Coalitions in Oregon. As you may know, OHEA and other RHECs advocate for racial justice informed health equity policies and practices, using a social determinants of health framework. In the last legislative session, we supported Stable Homes for Oregon Families, and remain committed to ensuring that community members, our friends, families, and loved ones are able to remain in their homes or places of rest and shelter through the winter and beyond. SB 278 passed with almost unanimous support with a commitment that no one who has applied for assistance will lose their home and that help would be there when they need it. We need lawmakers to act so that the promise isn't broken.

What we know is that evictions for nonpayment have skyrocketed across the state, in the midst of a known housing shortage, sky-high rents, and lack of access to affordable housing. While there is a backlog of rent assistance and the state rent assistance has been shut down due to overwhelming need and we understand that there are technical issues, we can't help the frustration that is felt due to the state's inability to manage programs, resources, and needs of its community members. The evictions that are happening every day are both tragic and preventable. Thousands and thousands of renting households have been waiting for rent assistance for two months, three months, or longer. Moreover, based on application data we know BIPOC Oregonians are disproportionately affected, in addition to already facing a disproportionate impact by the COVID pandemic, higher rates for needing to seek rent assistance as well as a greater risk of eviction<sup>1</sup>. These Oregonians are our families, our friends, our neighbors, and our community members.

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<sup>2</sup>. We believe our community members, people living in Oregon, deserve

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<sup>1</sup> [OHA Covid-19 Weekly Report](#), Dec. 1, 2021, OHCS Dashboard

<sup>2</sup> OHCS News Release 12/8/21

adequate resources through the winter to enable ongoing applications to be processed, and assurance to guarantee landlord compensation for nonpayment in the event a tenant's application is denied.

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<sup>3</sup>. In truth, housing is a health equity issue. People cannot stay well, get well, or thrive when they are at risk of, or under the stress of, possibly being evicted. This kind of stress exacerbates existing illnesses and further places people who face oppression, directly in situations that are harmful to their health and can possibly lead to serious illness and death. If we know lack of stable, affordable, and quality housing is already an issue here in Oregon, how in good conscience can we leave our community members in a position to be evicted from their homes, in this time, and under these (or any) conditions?

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

Thank you for your time and your support for extending safe harbor protections for tenants with pending rent assistance applications, and by providing more funding for rent assistance to get us through the winter months.

In health,

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Community Engagement and Advocacy Strategist, Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA)

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<sup>3</sup> Data from Oregon Law Center Eviction Defense Project