

December 9, 2021

Testimony to the Joint Interim Committee on The Second Special Session of 2021

Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Fahey, Co-Vice Chair Knopp, Co-Vice Chair Breese-Iverson,
Members of the Committee:

My name is Chevelle Barham and I live in Tigard. I want to thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you and thank you for responding to the emergency that is happening in communities across the state and doing what you can to ensure you can keep people and families like mine in their homes.

I ask that you extend safe harbor protections for people like me who applied for assistance months ago - for me more than six months ago - and still haven't received help and are at risk of eviction. No one waiting in line for help should be evicted because of an arbitrary deadline. And please refund the rent assistance program. Too many people are still struggling because of the pandemic or wildfires.

Shortly before the pandemic hit, I was living with my mom after leaving an abusive relationship of six years. Then last year, I moved to my own place. I was really happy to have secured a place for me and my four-year-old daughter. As the shutdown went on, I had to stop working since I work as a hairstylist. By October 2020, I had drained all of my funds just to put food on the table.

Since I couldn't work, I obviously needed help to pay my rent so I applied in April 2021 through the state for assistance. I applied right when it opened and I still didn't hear anything until this September.

In the meantime, even with the eviction protections, I've been getting notices from my property management company since January pressuring me to pay rent and reminding me that I'll owe it all--at this point more than \$5,000.

I notified my landlord in May that I applied for assistance but that was more than six months ago so I am no longer protected by safe harbor. I've done everything right and have tried my hardest and now because of an arbitrary deadline and a system that isn't responding fast enough, I could lose out on the support my family needs to stay in our home.

I'm stuck in limbo - my back rent needs to be paid but I don't have any money to pay it and if I use the income I'm making now from my job to pay what I owe, I can't pay my current rent.

I didn't choose not to pay rent. I don't have the credit or other options to get more loans to pay off what I owe. If I'm evicted I don't know what I'll do. If I were to lose my home, it would disrupt my daughter's education and affect her future. And I worry about all the other families in my neighborhood who are in the same situation - they all have kids, haven't been able to work, owe

rent and are facing eviction.. What's going to happen to them? We were all told we couldn't leave our homes for everyone's health and safety and because I did the right thing, now I might be evicted from my home.

The hardship is not just financial, it's also mentally and emotionally exhausting. It's hard to not know what to do and overwhelming to try and navigate the system. It's hard to not just give up. I keep going for my daughter.

When you all created the safe harbor period, you made a promise that no one should get evicted who applied for help. I am one of the tenants who have done exactly what was asked, but I'm still facing eviction - not because of anything I've done. The time period you gave wasn't long enough. It didn't give enough time for applications to be processed. Please honor your promise to those of us who have applied for help and are still waiting. Please vote yes on the bill before you to extend the safe harbor period for everyone who applies for rent assistance.