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We believe that everyone deserves to live a life free from violence.

December 11, 2021

To the Joint Interim Committee On the Second Special Session for the Housing Safe Harbor Bill:

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.

As the Executive Director of Raphael House of Portland I have witnessed the dedicated staff here help dozens of domestic survivors apply for this rent assistance in order to maintain their safe and stable housing. We have been a safe haven for survivors of domestic violence fleeing abuse for more than 40 years, and we proudly help families find the long-term safety, stability, and independence they deserve. There has never been a crisis to the safe homes they are creating as what we have seen in this past 20 months.

And it is not going to end anytime soon. The pandemic may seem to be winding down, but the reality for people who are just getting on their feet financially there are some real dangers to their stability, health and safety. Here are some very real examples of women who are dedicated to maintaining their safe homes and pushing ahead towards their goals- but the pandemic has interrupted this path:

- *A woman who was working with a career/job training agency planned to apply for a job with a nonprofit- as a survivor of domestic violence, she wanted to give back to the community. As she was applying, the Head Start her young children attended closed time 3X due to Covid-19 outbreaks. She realized, as a single mother she would not be able to hold a job with regular hours with this uncertainty.*
- *A Mother of 3 and past shelter resident, had trained and was beginning a good construction job- with a thriving wage. She was beginning to build income. As this new school year started, her kids each got sick, sharing it one by one with each other and needed to stay home to care for each. She lost this job. She is out looking for more work, but she is acutely aware is a very tentative situation for her as a single parent.*

Do not let these families start over in homelessness or vulnerable to violence.
Do not let Oregon's statewide housing crisis get worse.

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.
 - This process has been very cumbersome, difficult and particularly challenging to those challenged with digital literacy, language skills and education level. The application is over 20 pages long.
- 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.
 - We know that a 72-hour notice period is sending people into homelessness.
 - This is costly as a system as a whole.
 - Raphael House and other non-profits are here to help people with the terrifying reality of a 72-hour notice, but this, too, takes time- despite how swiftly we attend to the need.
- 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.
 - Why would risk people losing their safe housing when there is so much homelessness now – especially when we know that funds are available.

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.

This larger problem should not be on the backs of the most vulnerable Oregonians. Again, we are still in the crisis of the pandemic. Our work to protect our community is not over. We need to continue to walk alongside people living on the edge and walk

together to help them stay safe and protect our community in the process. We are honored to work with this Legislative body in doing so.

In Sincerity and Commitment to serving survivors,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emmy Ritter', with a long, sweeping tail stroke.

Emmy Ritter

Executive Director

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