



December 11, 2021

Re: Testimony in support of the Housing Safe Harbor Bill (LC 9)

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of LC 9, the Housing Safe Harbor Bill. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Deputy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color, an alliance of culturally-specific community-based organizations working to take collective action for racial justice.

Thank you for coming together to consider this critical legislation. In the 2021 session, SB 278 was able to ensure that Oregonians wouldn't be evicted as they waited for their landlord to receive rent assistance. But to implement this goal, we will need additional statutory changes to fulfill the commitment made by the Legislature to protect those awaiting relief. Thousands of households were relying on this rent assistance to come through, and we cannot allow anyone with a pending application to be evicted for nonpayment.

The Legislature must act during this session to provide new funding for ongoing access to rent assistance as we go into winter, and for the landlord guarantee fund. We also must ensure that SB 278's safe harbor provision covers the entire application period, no matter when they apply. Another important change is extending the sunset on the current 10-day notice period for nonpayment evictions, and updated information to tenants about the eviction process and how to seek rent assistance. This is a common-sense provision that works to facilitate access to available resources designed to prevent displacement. We can also remove the risk for landlords by expanding and extending the current 60-day landlord guarantee fund to cover any period of time if a landlord delays eviction and a tenant is ultimately denied assistance or receives less than is owed when the case is closed.

If the Legislature fails to act, we will push thousands of Oregonians who have applied for help out of their homes, putting them at risk of homelessness. And this risk will not be equally shared across our state's residents. Black, Native American, Latinx, and Pacific Islanders faced entrenched disparities before the pandemic with lower incomes, fewer assets, and higher housing cost burdens. They were hit hardest by the pandemic, both as a public health crisis and an economic one. And if we abandon renters waiting for assistance now, it's our communities of color—as well as our rural communities, and our low-income families—who continue to be most at risk. As a result, these Oregonians have also needed to seek rent assistance at higher rates, and are at greater risk of eviction.

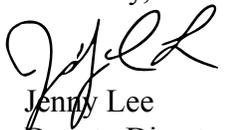
Evictions have lifelong and intergenerational impacts as they threaten housing stability going forward. Dealing with the impact of an eviction will derail lives and break up communities.

Finding a new home and affording rental and security deposits are challenging under the best of circumstances. More than half of Oregonians were paying 50 percent of their income toward housing *before* the pandemic, and financial worries are continuing to grow for households as they seek to make ends meet. An eviction during a precarious recovery will be even more devastating and destabilize individuals, families, and our state as a whole.

If we fail to take action, the Oregonians who have had the least access to resources: those who have lost their jobs, who never earned enough to save for a rainy day, who had the most difficult time accessing assistance due to language barriers or the digital divide—will lose the very foundation of anyone’s stability: their home. All of the investments our state made, and the challenges we overcame together, will be squandered if we let renters fall off this cliff.

Thank you again for your work to navigate Oregon through the pandemic. Please stay the course, for the sake of Oregonians who rent their homes.

Sincerely,



Jenny Lee
Deputy Director

