

Dear Co-Chairs Beyer and Fahey, and all committee members,

My name is Tia Politi and I live in Pleasant Hill. I am the President of Oregon Rental Housing Association and the Rental Owners Association of Lane County. I also operate Rental Housing Support Services, providing consultation, mediation, education, and eviction services. In my experience in the courtroom, I am successful in resolving most issues between my clients and their residents through negotiated settlements that allow both parties to move forward in a positive way or part ways with as little drama as possible.

I strongly support the idea of mediation as a first step either before court processes begin or during the process. By the time the parties have reached the step of court eviction, there are usually hard feelings on both sides, making it challenging to reach agreement. I also recommend that you consider offering a specific type of mediation – Evaluative Mediation. This type of mediation requires mediators have some knowledge of landlord-tenant law in order to assist each party in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their position as it relates to their likelihood of success in court. Knowing how things play out can influence a person's willingness to negotiate at all. In my experience, both parties think they have rights or defenses that just aren't there, making them likely to lose their case, and exacerbating conflict.

Also, many residents don't know what options might be available to help them either financially or with curing lease violations. In addition to mediation, sharing information about available resources, or finding case management for someone struggling with noncompliance can make all the difference, so any mediation programs should work to connect residents with resources to ensure their success in housing. For example, I once managed a senior and disabled complex where we had a bedbug problem. One of the residents was developmentally disabled and struggled to comply with the needed clean up of her unit, but with the help of South Lane Mental Health's Act Team, got her unit cleaned up so that we could successfully address the problem. Without that assistance, she would not have been able to achieve compliance and could have been evicted for noncompliance.

I know this type of service is not what is being considered today but should be what lawmakers and housing advocates look at as part of the solution to our homelessness problem in Oregon moving forward. Many residents truly want to comply with the rental agreement but have mental health issues or other disabilities that create barriers to compliance. Trained mediators who can offer options to assist with compliance can really help keep vulnerable residents in their homes. As we know, once these folks get evicted for cause, they usually end up on the streets.

Housing providers would be likely to support a process that helps us get rent arrearages and that does not contribute to the homelessness crisis. Regarding nonpayment evictions (the most common type of eviction), access to rent assistance can make all the difference. Providing resources and information that can help both parties will be crucial piece of preventing homelessness and preventing evictions from being filed in the first place.

Skilled mediation helps balance the power between housing providers and renters and allows for more creative problem solving. Mediation can help us retain renters, set up payment plans, and discuss move out dates, if necessary, that allow negotiated time for new housing to be secured. In Lane County, where I live, mediation is offered in small claims cases only and the mediators are all volunteers. That is unsustainable. We all volunteer as we are able in whatever way we can in our communities but relying

on unpaid volunteer mediators is not a good solution. We all have our own bills to pay and paying mediators is only fair.

In summary, mediation designed to prevent eviction provides a humane stop in the process to get us all working together. Personally, I would like to see cities and counties offer free mediation services to housing providers and residents at whatever point they reach an impasse. In my experience it can be largely successful, allowing both parties to move forward in a positive way. Please fund immediate and long-term eviction prevention mediation. We have a long-standing mediation network in this state that has an excellent track record. They can help us prevent 1000's of evictions if they have the resources to serve housing providers and renters in Oregon.

Thank you for working to find solutions for housing providers and residents.

Warm regards,

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