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December 10, 2021

Re: CWS Support for LC 9 Rental Assistance

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

I am writing today to urge you to continue, to modify and to expand the tenant protections provided in SB 278 (2021 Session).

The mission of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS) is to break the isolation of domestic and sexual violence. Incorporated in 1985 as Clackamas County's first domestic violence shelter, CWS is one of the most comprehensive community-based organizations in the state providing services to survivors of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, elder and vulnerable adult abuse, human trafficking and exploitation, and stalking. The wide-ranging slate of services provided by CWS includes emergency shelter, transitional housing, a 24/7 crisis line, mobile advocacy, mental health counseling, support groups, legal advocacy, youth violence prevention education, Camp HOPE Oregon, and community education. At our secure emergency shelter, rural outreach offices, Clackamas Community College, DHS, Camp HOPE Oregon, and A Safe Place Family Justice Center (ASP-FJC), CWS coordinates services with other public and private agencies to best serve survivors seeking help.

A safe and stable place to call home is a basic human need.

As you know, the State of Oregon has been hit hard by several crises over the past two years. The ongoing pandemic and summer wildfires have devastated communities across the state and thrown families into economic distress. Prior to 2020, Oregon was already experiencing a housing crisis, and too many of our neighbors and community members were experiencing housing instability. In times of crisis like the ones that we experienced last year, and the one we are continuing to experience, a strong response to aid those who are most impacted is critical.

According to the ACLU and other sources, domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Violence is also a significant public health issue that affects all aspects of an individual's well-being. Oregon has one of the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence in the nation, making the connection between domestic violence, homelessness, and health a significant public concern. According to the Oregon Women's Foundation's Count Her In Report, approximately 1 million women and girls will be affected by domestic or sexual violence in their lifetime.

At CWS we have worked diligently to provide emergency shelter as well as stable housing for over 50% more households since the onset of the pandemic. Victims in their children are in housing with safety plans that are specifically tied to their current home. With children returning to school and workplaces opening more each day now is not the time to displace victims and their children that are just beginning to heal from the trauma of abuse and the isolation that was compounded by the pandemic.

Safe and stable housing, along with access to supportive networks, are fundamental elements that influence social determinants of health. For individuals and families displaced by domestic and sexual violence, the possibility of housing insecurity, and even homelessness, often looms large. In their escape from their abusers, victims are often cut off from the resources that support daily living. Leaving them with nothing more than the clothes on their back and their children in tow, victims can be overwhelmed and isolated by fear and uncertainty. Circumstances can be even direr for victims from marginalized populations and communities experiencing oppression.

Numerous studies have also shown that victims faced with economic barriers experience domestic violence at higher rates because they have fewer resources to attain safe and stable housing. In a study conducted by the National Alliance to End Family Homelessness, 46% of homeless women report having stayed in an abusive relationship because they did not have a safe alternative. National Network to End Domestic Violence tracks housing support as the most requested service requested by victims displaced by domestic violence. Research finds that victims who secure safe and stable housing experience a reduction in re-victimization rates.

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 (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.

No one should be evicted for non-payment while rent assistance is on the way. We must ensure continued access to rent assistance in the coming months, and we must act to prevent the generational harm caused by displacement while payments are being made.

Thank you for your time and for your service to the State of Oregon.

Sincerely,



Melissa Erlbaum, MPA
Executive Director