

December 11, 2021

Joint Interim Committee on the
Second Special Session of 2021
Oregon Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Fahey, Co-Vice Chair Knopp, Co-Vice Chair Wallan, and members of the Committee,

In the past year, 211info has received over 100,000 calls related to housing need from Oregonians negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on call volume, it is clear that Oregonians—many of whom are blue collar and low-income workers and individuals of color—have struggled to pay their rent since the start of the pandemic and have been unable to financially recover in the months since. Because of this, this past session 211info advocated for SB 278, which 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.

Legislative action is still needed to protect Oregon's renters. Currently, more than 7,900 low-income households who have applied for assistance to maintain their housing stability and pay off rent debt that accrued during the financial crisis of the pandemic have been waiting so long, their safe harbor period has expired and they have no legal protection from eviction. More than 24,000 other households are also in the queue, getting closer to their expiration dates every day. Due to this overwhelming demand for rent assistance, statutory changes are necessary to implement the goals of SB 278. The government has promised relief to thousands of households, and we need to ensure that promise is kept.

Since the fall, 211info has worked with the Oregon Housing and Community Services agency to help impacted residents navigate the application process for rent assistance dollars. Our call takers hear over and over again from Oregonians still struggling with the financial impacts of the pandemic due to no fault of their own. 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. 211info urges you to pass LC 9, providing new funding for rent assistance and extending the sunset on tenant protections for those are waiting to receive their rent assistance funding.

Thank you.