

March 4, 2021

Re: Support for SB 282-1, Tenant COVID Protections

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Nancy Slavin and I am a landlord, racial justice volunteer with Clackamas County SURJ. Chair Jama, we spoke on the phone a while back and I am happy to support you in your service to our state as our newest senator. Today, I write this letter to testify about tenant stability, and to urge you and members of the committee to support this bill. Thank you for taking up SB 282-1, which is essential for the health and wellbeing of people in our communities.

I'm lucky in that our renters have had stable housing, and in fact, one is leaving because after ten years of renting from us, he is buying his own house. However, I want any new tenants to feel safe and comfortable in our units, and to feel protected in these very difficult times for all. The bill will stabilize renter households, and ensure that there is time for state and federal rent assistance to reach landlords and resolve back rent debt. A temporary setback during COVID shouldn't make it impossible to rent in the future.

In particular, I am concerned about our Black and Brown community members, who are at the greatest risk of lifelong harm from the COVID evictions. Discriminatory housing policies have made homeownership difficult and inaccessible. I work with folks who are both tenants and homeowners and yet, as higher rates of COVID exposure are leaving people ill and economically stressed, people of color at higher risk of rental and mortgage evictions.

This issue crosses party and geographic lines. Republicans and Democrats alike, rural and urban alike, will face eviction through no fault of their own because of COVID lost income. And rural Oregon has the highest rates of student homelessness in the state, which is where our rental properties are, so that issue is close to my heart.

I spoke up for the eviction moratorium, which was essential in helping renters stay safe and stable in their homes, but we still need more time to help people pay thousands of dollars in back rent or to apply for rental assistance, especially as we have seen very little to no federal relief. At current rates, the state won't be fully vaccinated by rent due date of June 30th and our economy will likely remain in partial shutdown. If renters can't go back to work, they can't pay their back rent.

And beyond COVID, the prospects for jobs for lower income Oregonians remains dim, and to compound that stress, we are also facing enormous and ongoing climate adaptations, represented by last summer's wildfires and recent ice and snow storms in the metro area, where I was personally out of power for 8 days, couldn't work (because I have a child at home to take care of), but mostly thought of those in more dire circumstances. We must adapt and protecting the housing rights of our most vulnerable communities has to happen first so that people can adapt to all the changes.

We must act to ensure that the fallout from the COVID pandemic does not sentence Oregonians who rent their homes to lasting collateral consequences. I urge you to pass SB 282-1.

Thank you for your work.

Nancy Slavin
Clackamas County