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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 282: Tenant COVID-19 Recovery

4 March 2020

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

My name is Cecil Charles Prescod, and I serve as Minister of Faith Formation at Ainsworth United Church of Christ in Portland and am a member of the Public Policy Advisory Committee of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. I am writing in strong support of SB 282. Working with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strives to envision communities of faith in ministry together creating a more peaceful, just, sustainable, and compassionate world. EMO works to improve the lives of Oregonians through housing and other direct service programs, dialogue and advocacy.

EMO's support for ensuring protections to keep Oregonians in stable housing stems from both our commitment to justice as well as our experience operating four housing-related programs for marginalized communities. As a community of faith, we proclaim that our state has a moral imperative to keep our neighbors in housing through supportive services like those provided in SB 282. **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, preventing countless Oregonians from experiencing houselessness.**

Now more than ever, we must also prevent houselessness to combat the injustice of systemic racism in Oregon's housing market. Our Black and Brown neighbors are at the greatest risk of lifelong harm from the COVID evictions. Discriminatory housing policies have made homeownership difficult and inaccessible, leaving people of color at higher risk of rental evictions even as higher rates of COVID exposure are leaving people ill and economically stressed. This issue crosses party and geographic lines. We need to ensure Oregon's recovery doesn't leave anyone out. Working mothers, BIPOC Oregonians and blue-collar workers have borne the economic brunt of the pandemic both because they are most likely to have lost income, are more likely to rent their homes or are more likely to have contracted COVID.

The eviction moratorium was essential in helping renters stay safe and stable in their homes, but we need more time to help people pay thousands of dollars in back rent or to apply for rental assistance. Our guiding social principles remind us that each human is affirmed in their dignity, with rights to safe and affordable housing. EMO is committed to promote both the welfare of all children and the overall health and economic stability of families and communities. We must ensure that people have time to access to assistance, and aren't unfairly evicted after the moratorium ends.

We call upon the legislature to take this important step in supporting Oregonians as we navigate COVID recovery.

Thank you for your work and consideration of this essential legislation.

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