



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Smith Warner
Vice-Chairs Drazan & Holvey
Members of the House Rules Committee

FR: Jacob Finkelman, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: 278 Support, Critical COVID Protections for Renters

June 15, 2021

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. Safe and stable housing is inextricably linked to the safety and prosperity of workers and their families. SB 278 is essential for the health and well being of all workers. It stabilizes renter households, and ensures that there is time for state and federal rent assistance to reach landlords and resolve back rent debt, protecting families that have already applied for rental assistance.

Oregon has hundreds of millions of dollars for rent assistance but it's not getting out the door fast enough. We are not alone in this. Across the country as new relief has come in, systems and programs are rushing to get money out the door but the eviction moratorium deadline is simply coming too fast.

When the moratorium ends on June 30th, there will be no protections for people who cannot pay rent after July 1. Earlier legislation passed by this Legislature will give tenants time to pay back rent, but there are no grace periods for people who cannot pay rent on or after July 1. But there is money, and that is why we must take steps now with Senate Bill 278 to protect individuals and families who have applied for rent assistance from eviction, while their applications are pending. Evicting people who have applied for help is simply unfair.

The post-COVID recovery has not yet come for too many Oregon families. 17% of Oregon renters and 24% of parents or guardians said they could not pay June rent according to the most recent U.S. Census Pulse Survey. 54% of people behind on rent said they were likely to be evicted. Working mothers, BIPOC Oregonians and lower income 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. People of color are disproportionately impacted. The Survey continues to show renters are making extreme sacrifices to stay in their homes - putting basic needs on credit cards, spending down savings or selling assets, borrowing money from family or friends, or skipping meals. When working families become housing-insecure, it is a devastating blow to their industries, their communities, and their families that will likely be felt for generations to come.

Under SB 278, a tenant who provides their landlord with documentation that they have applied for rent assistance may not be evicted for nonpayment for 60 days. This will allow time to help ensure that rent assistance payments reach the landlord. The bill ensures stability for tenants while getting resources into the hands of landlords.

Evicting someone who has done everything right is simply unfair. Renters cannot and should not be the ones who pay the price for the system overload that delays assistance.

SB 278 protects both tenants and landlords. Oregon has significant federal dollars available for rental assistance to cover up to 12 months of back rent and three months of current and future rent.

The Oregon Legislature has taken significant and much appreciated steps during the pandemic and the wildfires to prevent evictions and keep people in their homes. It would be tragic if in these final weeks, people faced an unfair eviction because money didn't get allocated on time. We cannot allow all the good work we've done to keep people in their homes to fall apart now, right as assistance is coming available.

Please quickly pass SB 278.