



29 January 2023

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, I write in support of Senate Bill 799, which will provide essential eviction protections to endangered and vulnerable renters. My name is Jimmy Jones and I am the Executive Director of MWVCAA, where we serve low-income residents of Marion, Polk and 11 other counties across Oregon. Annually we provide more than \$70 million in services and direct client assistance for housing, homelessness, energy and weatherization, and early learning programs to more than 55,000 Oregonians in poverty.

Prior to the pandemic, about 18,000 Oregon households were evicted each year, most of them for non-payment. Over the past two years, we have dramatically reduced the number of evictions. In recent months, as protections expired and resources declined, monthly eviction filings have been rising, pushing toward 2,500 filings statewide. The coming year will be a very dangerous time for renters in Oregon. Given the low housing stock, soaring rental market costs, and landlord debt history that chases renters from one home to another, a 2023 eviction is categorically different from a 2015 or 2019 eviction. For the rent-burdened and the poor in Oregon, the economic consequences of COVID continue to cast a long shadow. Wages have increased, but inflation has driven the cost of basic needs beyond the ability to pay. Those costs force the poor to choose between gas for their cars or food for their families. To choose between going to the doctor or paying the light bill. And often paying the rent in the face of hunger, heat or the need to work is impossible. Our social safety network has frayed. We now stand on the precipice of a massive increase in our homeless population.

Since the pandemic began in 2020, state and federal resources have saved thousands of Oregonians from homelessness. Those financial resources are mostly gone. And even if they were here in the same volume now, there is no one silver bullet in fighting the gathering eviction storm that lies ahead of us. We need a package of complimentary reforms, working in unison, to stem the tide and keep our citizens healthy, thriving, and safe.

This bill would create a permanent 60-day safe harbor period for renters who have applied for rental assistance and notified their landlords. The safe harbor period will **prevent** the cruel tragedy of lighting fast evictions for our poor, women and children, and especially our communities of color, giving resources and systems the precious time they need to work. It will **require** landlords to accept payments prior to a final court judgement (which has been a pressing problem in recent months). It will **protect** our refugee, farmworker, and immigrant communities by requiring eviction information to be available in the six most common languages in Oregon. And it **protects** evicted tenants from needless and often insurmountable barriers that come with prior evictions.

I urge your support of Senate Bill 799, and quick passage out of the Committee. These reforms, combined with \$100 million in new rental assistance, will give us the best chance we have to stabilize the rental market in Oregon, provide protections for our poorest citizens, and stem the gathering tide of a new homeless crisis that will overwhelm the fabric of our social safety net here in Oregon.

We have troubled times ahead. In the past year alone, more than 500 homeless residents of our state have perished, many dying outside, many of unnatural causes, many far too young, and every single one of them needlessly. For most, timely assistance from effective programs years ago could have prevented their homelessness. What we do here, we do now. And what we do now, will echo on for a generation.

Respectfully,

Jimmy Jones
Executive Director