

Submitter: Michelle Thurston

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure: SB603

My name is Michelle Thurston. I am a proud founding member of Residents Organizing for Change. I live in Cottage Grove. As with the entire country, Cottage Grove is not immune from effects of the housing crises, homelessness, lack of affordable housing, access to affordable medical care including dental, vision and behavioral Health, affordable childcare and the rising cost of food.

We hear stories every day of people who struggle to survive day to day. I have my own story of daily struggles as a disabled woman who lives in a rural community who lives on a fixed income. But I am so fortunate that I live in one of the few affordable units available in my community.

But I want to share the true story of a woman who just turned 70. She was married, had two kids, worked full time, always picking up extra shifts as a Registered Nurse to provide money so her kids could do sports and after school activities. But. As what happens to millions of Americans, life happened, divorce, then she got sick, the kind of sick that is devastating. she got Lupus, Rheumatoid Arthritis. But then came one Cancer, then another Cancer. The once healthy strong, hard-working woman, mother, wife, nurse. was barely surviving. The place she lived continued to raise the rent and after 10 years her rent increased over 130% month. Basic utilities, transportation, medical costs all soared through the roof. Food? That was a luxury. I watched as every month she sank deeper into debt. Literally watching her struggle in tears on what medication she could afford. Or wondering if she can skip this Oncology appointment because the copay is \$65. And not hearing the world around her because so could not afford a pair of hearing aids.

All she needed was a little help. But she literally made \$2 too much to qualify for state assistance. I can only imagine how she would be today if she was able to receive \$1000 a month to help her through the crisis allowing her to purchase the medication she needed, pay for transportations to appointments, pay for copays and afford healthy food until she found affordable housing. This is the story of just one woman.

There are literally thousands of stories like her. Some younger, with kids, male, female, veteran, student. But that doesn't matter. Report after Report shows how programs like this have worked in various locations. Senate Bill 603 if passed could be enough to help a person stop struggling to live and survive. But allow them to thrive. Don't just think SB 603 will only impact 1000 Oregonians. Know that those 1000 people have a direct impact on their family, and the people around them and the communities in which they live. This bill has the power and potential to make a positive cascading effect for the entire state of Oregon. It just takes one bold step forward to make progress.