



community alliance of tenants

March 2, 2023

Co-Chairs Sen. Aaron Woods & Rep. David Gomberg
Joint Ways and Means, Transportation and Economic Development Subcommittee

Re: Support for \$100 million in Emergency Rent Assistance Homelessness Prevention funds

Dear Co-Chairs Woods, Gomberg and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Community Alliance of Tenants I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 5511 to provide critical funding in the Oregon Housing and Community Services budget in order to:

- Prevent homelessness;
- Rehouse people experiencing homelessness; and
- Build and preserve more affordable housing units statewide

Specifically, I submit this testimony in support of an investment of \$100 million in POP #90 for homelessness prevention funding.

The Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) is a membership-based statewide association of over 6000 tenants. We educate and empower tenants to demand safe, stable, and affordable rental homes. We believe that housing is the basis of a strong community. So we bring tenants together to organize and collectively advocate for fair and equal protections in housing practices and policies.

Every day our staff at CAT answer a call from someone who cannot pay the rent and without help is at risk of becoming homeless. When we refer someone to an agency that has rent assistance we know that preventing a household from eviction is the most important and cost-effective measure of helping a household recover from a short-term economic loss. Our members took this knowledge and identified rent assistance as a key strategy to prevent homelessness and stabilize communities. They also identified the need to support culturally specific organizations to ensure that resources are equitably received in every community.

OHCS has sought culturally specific organizations to serve as partners to disburse a share of its program funding in an effort to achieve equity for housing stabilization programs and down payment assistance funding. Some of these partnerships are nascent, consisting of smaller organizations that may lack the capacity or familiarity with program execution and/or reporting requirements. We support these efforts because state agencies must balance the need to expeditiously deploy their resources with the value of newer partnerships that may require greater time and attention in order to achieve program expectations in terms of both results and fiscal accountability.



We are extremely grateful to Governor Kotek, legislative leadership, and this committee for recognizing the importance of moving swiftly with an urgent homelessness package to begin to address immediate needs.

\$100 million in funding for emergency rent assistance and eviction prevention to community action agencies and culturally specific programs across the state is an essential element of homelessness prevention. These funds are necessary because of our high rate of homelessness, low availability and high cost of rental housing, chronic disparities in homeownership, and the economic uncertainty that Oregon renters continue to live under. We are facing an extreme housing crisis in our state, with unprecedented levels of need in urban and rural areas across the state.

Oregon is 4th in the nation of people per capita experiencing homelessness, according to the most recent national study, which is not surprising as we also have the 4th lowest rental vacancy rate in the country and renters pay the ninth highest rent in the country based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development. Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes. According to the state economist, more than 50% of Oregon renters do not have enough money left over for food, medicine, and basic necessities. That means too many Oregon families are living on the edge and are one missed paycheck, high health care or car repair bill, or other setback away from losing their housing. That plays out in Oregon eviction court rooms every day, where more than 86% of all court evictions are due to a missed rent payment. The situation is more serious for Black Oregonians, who are 30% less likely to be homeowners and more likely to be renters due to the legacy of historic policies that blocked Black people from purchasing and owning property in our state.

Rental assistance keeps people housed, keeps families stable, keeps children in the classroom, and prevents homelessness. This is a smart investment today that will avoid higher human, financial, and societal costs later.

We strongly urge passage of \$100 million in emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention resources.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kim McCarty
Executive Director
Community Alliance of Tenants