



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

March 27, 2023

Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: **Support for SB 611**

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony, on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, in strong support of SB 611. This bill will serve as a critical homelessness prevention strategy to protect seniors, families, individuals, and communities across the state from extreme rent increases and displacement.

Northwest Pilot Project (NWPP) is a social service agency with over five decades of experience in providing housing stabilization services to low and very low-income older adults, age 55 and over, experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Multnomah County.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, every \$100 increase in community median rent equals a 9% increase in local homelessness.¹ In Oregon, high-rent displacement is reaching a crisis level: more than 86% of court evictions are for non-payment of rent.² At a time when Oregon is experiencing some of the highest rates of homelessness in the nation – and seniors age 65 and older are the fastest growing age group of people experiencing homelessness³ – we cannot afford to let unreasonable rent increases go unchecked.

SB 611 will help reduce homelessness caused by significant rent increases, and protect against displacement, while maintaining flexibility and reasonable profit for landlords by:

¹ “How COVID-19 Could Aggravate the Homelessness Crisis?,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, August 2020. <https://www.gao.gov/blog/how-covid-19-could-aggravate-homelessness-crisis>

² “Oregon Eviction Filings Data,” Oregon Law Center and Legal Aid Services of Oregon, January 2023. <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/50686>

³ The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness (2019), Dennis Culhane, PhD et al. <https://aisp.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Emerging-Crisis-of-Aged-Homelessness.pdf>

- Limiting rent increases to 3% + inflation with maximum increase of 8% during a calendar year;
- Narrowing the existing 15-year loophole and apply rent stabilization to buildings older than 3 years, which increases the number of people protected while exempting new construction;
- Increasing relocation assistance to three-months' rent, helping tenants displaced through no fault of their own avoid homelessness. Note: landlords with four units or less are exempt from this provision; and
- Setting no limits on rent resets between tenants.

As service providers, the NWPP team is constantly responding to a rapidly growing number of low-income older adults who are just one benefit payment, one health crisis, one rent increase, or one emergency away from homelessness. Prior to the passage of SB 608 and the implementation of the City of Portland's Relocation Ordinance, NWPP staff were receiving approximately 20-30 calls a month from community members requesting support due to large rent increases and no-cause evictions. The enactment of statewide and local tenant protections resulted in these types of calls dramatically decreasing. With these tenant protections in place, NWPP staff are able to dedicate more resources and time towards supporting our most vulnerable clients – those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Unfortunately, the 2023 rental rate increase maximum of 14.6% will undo the pivotal rent control policies implemented over the past few years, jeopardizing the stability of countless households and greatly hindering service providers' ability to respond to Oregon's homelessness crisis.

SB 611 is an action that the legislature can take now to have an immediate impact on our state's housing crisis, as we also work on the longer term solutions of increasing supply and providing support to rehouse our currently homeless neighbors. We strongly encourage your support of SB 611. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Golino de Lovato
Executive Director
Northwest Pilot Project