



March 27, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development

From: Emerson Hamlin, Political Organizer, Oregon Nurses Association

Re: Support for SB 611

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

Thank you for considering testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). ONA is a nurses union and professional association representing over 15,000 health care workers and providers, including registered nurses, advanced practice nurses, and allied health workers. Our members work in urban and rural hospitals, clinics, school-based health centers, home health, and county health departments across Oregon.

We strongly urge you to swiftly pass SB 611 because our members consistently see the detrimental impacts of homelessness on patients' health. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council has long found that homelessness creates new health problems and exacerbates existing ones. Between high levels of stress, little ability to access nutritious food, no safe place to store medications, and inconsistent access to clean, running water, it is easy for minor issues like cuts or colds to escalate into major health problems.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, people without housing experience higher rates of hypertension, asthma, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS than their housed peers.<sup>2</sup> In total, people experiencing homelessness have higher rates of illness and die an average of twelve years sooner than members of the average US population.<sup>3</sup> If we want healthy communities, we must do all we can to keep people housed.

Additionally, this is an issue that directly impacts ONA nurses: although our members have well-paying jobs, many are renters. They are facing the same exorbitant rent increases as other Oregonians, ranging from 15%, to as high as 50% this year. Our members often live in the same communities that they work in and are doubly committed to their service because their patients are also their neighbors. It's important that our providers can continue to live and serve in the communities they call home.

Passing SB 611 is not only critical to keep people housed, but to protect the health communities across Oregon. ONA urges a yes vote. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Emerson Hamlin

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<sup>1</sup> National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2019. *Homelessness & Health: What's the Connection?* [Fact Sheet].

<sup>2</sup> Zlotnick C, Zerger S, Wolfe P. Health Care for the Homeless: What We Have Learned in the Past 30 Years and What's Next. *American Journal of Public Health*. 103, S199\_S205, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301586>

<sup>3</sup> National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2019. *Homelessness & Health: What's the Connection?* [Fact Sheet].