

March 27, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development
From: Michelle Schimpke
RE: Support for SB 611

Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development

My name is Michelle Schimpke and I am a school social worker and a clinical social work associate, writing to urge swift passage of SB 611. Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes and are already paying some of the highest rents in the nation. We need reasonable protections to prevent displacement.

I work at two elementary schools in the metro Portland area, each with approximately 430 students. In the 2022-2023 school year, I have had about 35 families experience homelessness or displacement. Because of this, some of these students were eligible for McKinney-Vento homelessness services, subsequently providing them with transportation to and from their home school. However, the majority of these 35 families did not qualify for McKinney-Vento services, causing them to move schools and sometimes districts in the middle of the school year. Much like you have heard from data on this topic, the families most at risk and those experiencing situations like this are marginalized communities, those who have suffered domestic violence, refugees and families of color. The lack of affordable housing and tenants' rights is significantly impacting our students at inequitable rates.

Everyone in Oregon deserves safe and stable housing but our high rental costs and housing inequities are forcing families out of their homes. While the Oregon housing market provides skyrocketing property wealth for landlords, renters have nothing to fall back on when their monthly costs rise beyond their paychecks. Very few people can afford a 14.6% housing cost increase. An increase that high may as well be an eviction notice for Oregon renters.

Eviction, displacement and homelessness are particularly difficult for young people and students. Oregon has one of the highest student homelessness rates in the country. Data shows that about 23,765 Oregon students experienced homelessness or housing insecurity at some point in 2022. These students' circumstances put them at an incredible disadvantage through no fault of their own. They are unable to adequately study, learn, and wholly engage in their education. They are 27% less likely to graduate from high school than housed students.

SB 611 is a reasonable approach. Allowable annual rent increases for current tenants will be more predictable for current tenants and more homes will be protected. SB 611 does not solve all the inequities in our housing market, but it is an important step to a more equitable state and an essential element in the legislature's response to the state's homelessness crisis.

Please vote yes on SB 611 to prevent more high-rent homelessness in our communities.

Thank you.

Michelle Schimpke
School Social Worker