



**Oregon  
Law Center**  
WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR LOW INCOME OREGONIANS

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***Protect funding for homelessness prevention: emergency rent assistance and eviction defense***

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, Co-Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and members of the Ways and Means committee,

On behalf of Oregon Law Center, I am writing in support of protecting funding for homelessness prevention programs, including emergency rent assistance, as well as eviction defense and tenant legal supports offered by the Oregon Law Center, the Springfield-Eugene Tenant Association, and the Community Alliance of Tenants. These vital programs received devastating cuts in the 2025 legislative session, at a time when need is increasing exponentially.

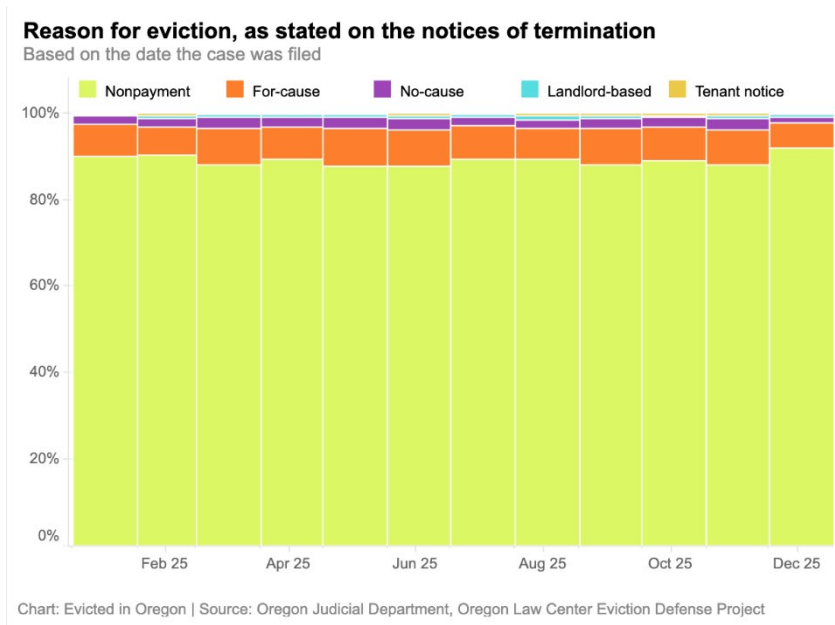
A missed paycheck, a medical emergency, a divorce: these can happen to anyone. Eviction defense and rent assistance help people stabilize and move forward. For those facing instability, turning them away doesn't solve the problem. It makes it worse, and more costly.

Oregon's shelter investments are making a difference. But no matter how many shelter beds Oregon builds, we cannot keep up if the pipeline into homelessness stays open. The state sheltered 49% more people than in 2023, but unsheltered homelessness still rose 27%. Portland State University (PSU) reported 3,052 unsheltered students, which may be the highest number in state history.

Shelter catches people. Prevention keeps them housed. We need both, and prevention is cost-effective. Keeping a family housed costs an average of \$2,600. This is five to 10 times less than rehousing someone after they become homeless.

Eviction is where the pipeline begins. According to PSU's "Evicted in Oregon," nearly 29,000 eviction cases were filed in Oregon courts in the last 12 months. In those cases, 47% of landlords had legal representation. Only 9% of tenants did. That imbalance determines outcomes. It falls hardest on Black, Latino, and Indigenous Oregonians, domestic violence survivors, families with children, and seniors, who are the fastest-growing group losing their homes.

Emergency rent assistance and eviction defense work together to close this pipeline. Rent assistance keeps families housed and resolves cases before they reach court. Eviction defense ensures tenants who do face court have a fair chance at staying housed.



The vast majority of evictions are for nonpayment, and with wages lagging behind rents, emergency rent assistance and eviction defense are often the difference between staying housed and losing everything. At the same time, federal cuts to Medicaid and other safety net programs will push more Oregonians toward homelessness.

As demand continues to rise, eviction defense, emergency rent assistance, and homelessness prevention programs are grappling with a 67% reduction in funding from last biennium. Already, OLC's Eviction Defense Program has been forced to shift to advice calls more often, away from hands-on legal representation in settlement discussions and court proceedings. For some facing eviction, phone advice is enough. But for many, especially those with disabilities or without the legal knowledge to counter a landlord's attorney, representing themselves will result in an eviction judgment even when it didn't need to.

Oregon Law Center urges the Legislature to preserve critical and cost-effective investments in homelessness prevention, emergency rent assistance and eviction defense to keep Oregonians housed.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Oregon communities.