

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice Chair Anderson and Members of the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness,

My name is Kelli Schaefer and I'm a Permanent Supportive Housing Case Manager for Northwest Pilot Project (NWPP) in Portland, OR. We have served low-income seniors in Multnomah County with long-term housing plans and supportive services for nearly 60 years. I am writing in support of SB 1523A, which is designed to bridge the digital divide for tenants and remove electronic barriers to housing.

In my job, I provide case management for low-income seniors, who have found housing despite incredible odds and countless barriers. Assisting elderly people after they transition from housing instability to permanent housing has given me insight into the daily challenges posed by the digital divide. Many of the clients we work with utilize a flip-phone and struggle with technological literacy. In addition, many can't afford, or aren't able to operate a smartphone or other electronic devices.

The older individuals we work with often communicate about the challenges of applying through an electronic portal to secure a unit or struggling to pay rent through a technological portal that is complicated to navigate. These individuals would greatly benefit from a paper application and the ability to pay rent with a cashiers check.

Basic housing protections for a digital age include the option to pay by check or other commercially reasonable method, the option to apply for housing on paper, and the option to a non-digital key to access facilities. These are low-cost, existing tools that landlords can simply continue to offer to ensure equal access to housing.

Implementing these protections will benefit seniors of all income levels who struggle with technology as well as low-income renters, offering concrete support to the clients NWPP serves. These budget-neutral solutions simply preserve common systems already used by landlords and property managers.

For all of these reasons, I urge your strong support of this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Oregon communities.

Sincerely,

Kelli Schaefer