

January 31, 2019

To: Senate Housing Committee

From: Jolene Aiken, Housing Specialist, Urban League of Portland

RE: Support for SB 608

Chair Fagan, Vice-Chair Girod, and Members of the Senate Housing Committee:

I am writing to share my experiences serving those impacted by Oregon's housing crisis. I have been a Housing Specialist at the Urban League of Portland since April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The Urban League of Portland's mission is to empower African Americans to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life. Our organization began providing housing services in 2015, to provide support and anti-displacement services to Black Oregonians, the population most likely to be severely rent-burdened and to experience discriminatory no-cause evictions.

As a housing specialist, I have work with participants who seek rental assistance and move in costs. These services are often the difference between stable housing and homelessness. Participants frequently share their stories of discriminatory no-cause evictions and rent that was continually raised until they could no longer make up the rent by diverting money away from other necessities like food and medication, so they come to the Urban League for help navigating their way back into secure, affordable housing.

This is how I met Preston Owens. Mr. Owens wanted help finding a place to live after an unexpected event caused him to lose his home of nine years. Mr. Owens asked that share his story—a story that is not unique to just Mr. Owens—to show what no-cause evictions and destabilizing rent increases look like for so many Oregonians.

Mr. Preston Owens is now 64 years old, and resided at 59<sup>th</sup> and SE Gladstone in Portland for nine years. Mr. Owens lives with multiple health concerns and receives a modest monthly income from social security disability. He was living with roommates in this home, each paying about \$400 a month. His landlord issued a no-cause eviction notice on Mr. Owens door in October 2018. This is when he first reached out to our organization. The best option we were able to help him find still costs \$800 a month, well over his monthly disability check. The Urban League is now helping with his rent costs while we wades his way through long waitlists for affordable housing. We were able to find a room for him for \$800, which is more than his monthly income. In addition to his fixed income, Mr Owen's rental history that now shows a no-cause evictions create additional barriers for him to access housing.

This is why the protections provided by SB 608 are so important. If this law were in place in 2018, then Preston Owens wouldn't have an added barrier to his record, and might still be in housing that matches his financial means. Everyday, people in every county of this state are thrust into the displacement and rent burden that Mr. Owens lives with. I urge you to pass SB 608 for them, for Mr. Owens, and for the stability of all Oregon communities.

Thank you,  
Jolene Aiken  
Urban League of Portland