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February 1, 2019

Dear Chair Fagan, Vice Chair Girod, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paul Solomon and I am the Executive Director for Sponsors, a nonprofit organization that provides housing and wraparound services to individuals upon release from incarceration.

In 2018, more than 6,000 Oregonians were released from state prisons. Fifty percent of these individuals returned to our communities homeless, with nothing more than a bus ticket and a plastic bag containing all their earthly belongings. Recognizing the direct relationship between housing and success at nearly everything else – work, sobriety, family, community – Sponsors provides housing and wraparound services to those in greatest need.

Our programs are short-term, with an average stay of 60-90 days. The continued progress of even our most successful participants is dependent upon their ability to access safe, affordable housing after leaving Sponsors. In recent years, we have found it increasingly difficult to assist our participants in this task. Housing instability in our community has increased to such a degree that we've begun to direct resources toward longer-term housing developments to prevent our participants from returning to homelessness.

While some Sponsors program participants are fortunate to locate their own independent apartments, they currently have no protections against losing their homes for any or no reason whatsoever. They live in constant fear of evictions and unchecked rent increases. These women and men, many of them parents, have served their time and are working to rebuild their lives. We owe it to their children and to our communities to remove barriers to their success.

I ask you to please stand with me in support of SB 608, which offers common-sense steps toward ensuring that every Oregonian has a safe place to call home. Thank you for your service, for reading this letter, and for providing basic protections to renters in our communities.

Sincerely,

Paul Solomon, Executive Director

Services for People with Criminal Histories Since 1973

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