

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Housing,

I write to you today about SB 608. The bill that would end no-cause evictions as well as put in place an barrier against rent price gouging statewide. This is a (small) step in the direction of addressing the rental housing crisis in the state, and I recommend its passage. But, this bill is a bare minimum, and it contains some serious loopholes and exemptions that really ought to be sewn up to make it an effective law. As written, it offers far too many ways for landlords to continue profiting off a basic human right, and even has provisions that will increase the precarity of certain classes of renters.

About me: I am renter, a parent, a university mathematics professor, and for the last four years have been a volunteer tenant organizer in Portland. In that time, I have heard countless stories first-hand that speak to the substantial power imbalance between landlords and tenants—stories of egregious discrimination and retaliation by landlords neatly tucked away behind “no-cause” evictions, about tenants forced to move each year because of obscene rent hikes, tenants who live in fear of asking for repairs lest their landlord chooses to displace them. Our organization fields calls and messages daily from desperate tenants, struggling to survive, and who too often end up sleeping on couches, in cars, or in tents.

But I also have experience with tenants deciding not to take it on the chin any longer, to band together and demand basic dignity and respect in their housing. These brave tenants stick their necks to demand something more fair, but it shouldn't require an act of bravery. After all, it's *our housing* (even if the landlord owns the deed): we pay the mortgages, property taxes, utility bills, build the community, and provide them with a margin of profit on top of that—all just to keep a roof over our heads. This current relationship between the landlord and tenant is a holdover from the feudal age, and carries with it all of the inequality of that system.

With that perspective, consider these specific problems and possible improvements to SB 608:

- The **7% plus Western-states-CPI cap is far too high**. It is disingenuous to call this rent stabilization—a buffer against the most egregious price gouging, perhaps. How about limiting rent growth at just CPI instead? How does it make sense to jack up rents when wages are not growing even remotely as fast? (Recall that landlord expenses like property taxes are capped at 3% and banks would laugh at a potential buyer whose investment demanded more than 7% rent growth.)
- Vacancy control is good. A lot of the “rent control doesn't work” narrative stems from loophole-ridden rent control policies with vacancy *de*control (see California's terrible Costa-Hawkins Act). But current language of the bill contains what amount to **eviction bonuses** that incentivize for-cause evictions because the rent growth cap doesn't apply in those cases.
- The “3 strikes” rule is especially pernicious, as it offers no due process or means to cure. Rental contracts already reek of paternalism and micromanaging every aspect of our lives, and this part of the bill will exacerbate the problem, amounting to **harrassment of tenants**.
- The **relocation amount is too small and has too many exceptions**. Here in Portland, where we won relocation assistance, the amounts were set at 3 months median rent, and even that is insufficient to pay for all of the expenses of a forced displacement. Also, the “**small landlord**” **loophole is practically unenforceable**. How am I to discover all of my landlord's properties statewide, when they can hide behind LLCs and otherwise obscure their ownership?
- Finally, we need to **restore local control!** In addition to the mild rent growth caps and just-cause/relo provisions in this bill, we need to lift the statewide pre-emption on rent control. Certain municipalities are experiencing the housing emergency more acutely, and they deserve to be able to write their own ordinances. Certainly, **reject proposed Amendment 5** that extends pre-emptions against local control.