

Date: February 4, 2019
To: Oregon Senate Committee on Housing
From: Emily Ruggles
Re: Support for SB 608

Chair Fagan and members of the committee,

My name is Emily Ruggles. I teach Spanish at Westview High School and previously taught at Five Oaks Middle School, a title I school in Beaverton. A marked difference between the two schools is the frequency with which students move between schools, and in and out of the district.

At Five Oaks, newly arriving students were scared to trust me, exhausted from the stress of moving, and grieving the loss of friend groups. They also often struggled academically, because curriculum sequencing is particularly important in a world language classroom. Being forced to change schools because of yet another move doesn't just cause stress, exhaustion, and social isolation. It also directly disrupts students' education and makes it difficult—if not impossible—to catch up with the rest of the class.

In my experience, students who move frequently do so because their parents cannot make rent and eventually are evicted. Students experience extreme stress in the months that lead up to an eviction. There is also the desperate search for new housing once an eviction notice has been taped to your front door. I give my all to my students, but it isn't always enough. As an educator, nothing is worse than the realization that a need as simple as stable housing isn't being met, and that you've reached the limit on what you can do to help your student succeed.

More than any other students, those affected by the housing crisis need to build on academic victories, strengthen the few friendships they have, and maintain relationships with adults who have finally earned their trust.

Moving when you are low-income and discouraged and exhausted by the system is different than moving when you are middle class or upper middle class. The most vulnerable among us are students impacted by the lack of affordable housing—and this is happening on our watch. This year, we have an opportunity to acknowledge in a real way that we know students' needs extend beyond what we can offer them in the classroom. That is equity in action. It's also an investment in our future. I have seen firsthand in the world language classroom how much potential our schools, communities, and our state are squandering when we allow students to struggle because of something as basic as not having a safe and consistent place to call home. There is power in this room to change that, and I encourage you to do all that you can to use it by advancing SB 608. Thank you.

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