

Feb 18, 2019

**House Human Services and Housing
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301**

Re: SB 608

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Noble, Vice-Chair Sanchez and member of the committee.

I urge your support for SB 608 to provide housing stability for many of our vulnerable community members

I have lived in Coos County since 2003. I have worked various jobs in my community, many that work directly with people and currently work at the South Coast Food Share, the Regional Food Bank of Coos and Curry Counties. In my work I partners programs all over our region to bring food support to those who are or are on the verge of going hungry.

In my area, poverty impacts a larger percentage of females than males, and people of color, including Hispanic/Latino populations, according to both US Census data and statewide reports from Children First For Oregon. Extreme poverty effects 7.4% of the South Coast population, with 6,155 individuals living in households with income below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level. Although poverty affects all age groups, children are the most impacted by poverty on the South Coast. Updated estimates from Children First for Oregon calculate the childhood poverty rate for Coos County at 30.1% and Curry County at 25.3%, both higher than the state percentage of 21.6%. The estimated number of children living in poverty under age 5 for Coos and Curry Counties is 1,411, almost 29%.

Were you aware that

- 1 in 17 students in Coos & Curry Counties experienced homelessness during the 2015-16 school Year.
- 1 out of 4 renters in Coos County and 2 in 10 renters in Curry County are paying more than 50% of their income in rent.
- Across the region, 6 in 10 renters with extremely low incomes are paying more than 50% of their income in rent.
- Housing shortages are critical, with 28 housing units available for every 100 families with extremely low incomes in Curry County and 33 housing units for every 100 families with extremely low income in Coos County.

Although Coos and Curry reflects a high housing vacancy rate, in 2017 only 18.5% of vacant housing was for rent and 18.6% was for sale. The remaining 62.8% of vacant units were classified for other use. This make it extremely difficult to find and keep housing without some sort of stabilization in place.

Finding affordable and decent housing in our area is a very difficult for those with and without a steady income. I myself am a renter in my community and have found myself on more than one occasion walking a tightrope regarding my housing. While I am above the federal poverty line now my family spent many years at and below it. We have been in our current residence since the beginning of 2011 when my fiancé, his daughter and I all moved in together. For the first 4 years we paid \$875.00/month not including any utilities. In this time, we had various issues with old sewage pipes, an incorrectly installed dishwasher and garbage disposal and our heater breaking in the middle of winter. Our landlords made each issue harder to communicate with them as they insinuated us to be at fault for every issue that arose. After the heater broke our landlord and I had some words over the insinuation and his lack of compassion for my family or our pets and belongings as he advised he didn't care if our house burned down. Some six month later our rent was raised \$75.00/month. This was not a bad increase in our opinion as there had been various maintenance issues that had occurred, and it had been a few years of us living there with no increases. The following year however, our landlords started showing up to the property unannounced and when everyone was gone. Our neighbors mention it to us, and

there would be visible evidence of it such as the water hose moved to a weird place or weeds pulled and left in piles on our sidewalk. This continued for some six months before we asked them to be more respectful and to give us the proper notice when coming to the property. We received a letter no long after that our rent was going to be increased from \$950 to \$1150. Which was a huge increase that we were not prepared for. This felt very retaliatory, but we did not argue it. A month later they sent an additional letter advising our rent would only increase to \$1100. This is still the current price we pay and what I described was only a fraction of what has gone on in the time we have lived there. We are wary to contact them for anything for fear that they will unreasonably increase our rent again.

You may be wondering why we would continue to live in a situation where there is verbal abuse, lack of respect and retaliation when the law is asked to be followed. The answer is simple. We have been looking since 2013 for a new place to live. In 2013 we needed a decent house for two adults, a youth and our 2 cats at or below \$900 a month. It did not exist. Today in 2019 we need a decent home for just two adults and our one cat at or below \$1100/month. This also does not exist. In our limited rental market, we have 1-bedroom apartments for almost \$900 a month while 1-bedroom homes don't really exist on in our market and 2+ bedroom homes start at \$1300+. When there are homes that become available in the \$900-1100 range they generally have one or more of the following issues: poorly insulated, have old single pane windows, sit on cracked and sunken foundations and have signs of mold. To top it off, almost no one allows pets anywhere. It doesn't matter that we have paid our rent on time every month for over 8 years, that we repair what we can or that we both have full time jobs, finding a rental is near impossible.

This instability for renters is huge concern to me personally and professionally. I know that high rents and evictions cause hunger. Clients I have worked with tell me that they have to make the tough choice between rent and food, as I have had to do in my past as well. They speak of ever-increasing rents, fear of evictions and the inability to find an affordable place to call home. Some speak of becoming homeless for the first time because they cannot find an affordable place to live, something I have also been through. I know these concerns and fears exist outside of my communities.

Across Oregon, people who rent their homes and the organizations that advocate for them have been working to pass basic tenant protections for years. People cannot wait any longer for these essential protections. I urge you to vote yes on SB 608.

Sincerely,
Laura Hunter