

From the desk of Rep. Tawna Sanchez



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My View: Tenant protections help victims of abuse

RE: SB 608

By Melissa Erlbaum

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The tenant protection laws up before the state Legislature this month are essential new tools in the fight against domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment and they will bring more peace and security for people at risk.

That is why those of us who work with survivors and advocate on their behalf are strong proponents of Senate Bill 608.

The bill will ban most no-cause evictions, significantly cutting down on the discrimination and retaliation undermining the safety and stability of survivors in rental housing. The bill leaves intact all the for-cause eviction procedures, allowing landlords to terminate the rental agreement of a dangerous perpetrator with 24 hours' notice. That is the safest and fastest way to protect adults and children who are at risk of harm from someone living in close proximity with them and provides for due process.

Women who are evicted and living on the streets are at higher risk of sexual assault.

And according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, women experiencing harassment, assault, or ongoing domestic violence are more likely to face eviction than other women. We hear every day from victims who tell us they are afraid to call 911 for help, for fear of landlord retaliation and eviction. In most areas of the state, vacancy rates are so low and costs are so high, that finding a new home is nearly impossible.

We hear from mothers who are afraid to complain about mold or electrical problems in their homes, for fear they will be kicked out. We have worked with countless survivors who were finally able to leave the emergency shelter and establish safety in their own rental home, only to have no choice but to return to shelter or the streets if they are displaced by a rent increase or a no-cause eviction.

For example, one of our partner agencies worked with a woman (we will call her Sarah) who had worked hard to escape an abusive husband. Sarah knew she needed to get away from her abuser or face long-term health and safety consequences for her daughter and herself. Sarah not only stood up in court to face her abuser, she secured a job and an apartment. Within six months Sarah's rent was raised twice, one time by \$300 a month. Their family was on the brink of homelessness after working so hard to create a new stable home environment.

Passage of Senate Bill 608 will reduce displacement and discrimination. It will also protect housing stability which is of critical importance for survivors who have worked so hard to escape bad situations.

For all of these reasons, we stand in support of Senate Bill 608, alongside our partners at the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force and the Oregon Alliance to End Violence Against Women.

We applaud the lawmakers who are advancing this important legislation.

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