

Re: Support for SB 282-1, Tenant COVID Protections

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

My name is Rabbi Benjamin Barnett, and I serve congregation Havurah Shalom in Portland. I am writing in support of SB 282-1. This bill is an essential step for us to take in responding to the needs of all those struggling financially amidst this unprecedented crisis. It represents the very least of what we must do to fulfill our obligation to attend to the well-being and safety of Oregonians.

An estimated 11-16% of renters have fallen behind on rent. With dim prospects for recovering lost income, renting Oregonians need more time to stabilize their families. This bill will stabilize renter households, and ensure that there is time for state and federal rent assistance to reach landlords and resolve back rent debt. As nearly half a billion dollars of state and federal tenant and landlord assistance are being distributed, we must ensure that people have time to access assistance, and aren't unfairly evicted after the moratorium ends.

An eviction or a late payment can make it almost impossible for renters to access housing - if we don't act, the COVID pandemic will impact families for years to come. A temporary setback during COVID shouldn't make it impossible to rent in the future. We must come together and help each other through so that the impacts don't last a lifetime.

This issue crosses party and geographic lines. Republicans and Democrats, rural and urban alike, will face eviction through no fault of their own because of lost income due to COVID. Rural Oregon has the highest rates of student homelessness in the state. Working mothers, BIPOC Oregonians and blue-collar workers have borne the economic brunt of the pandemic both because they are most likely to have lost income, are more likely to rent their homes and/or are more likely to have contracted COVID. We need to ensure Oregon's recovery doesn't leave anyone out.

In Torah, the foundation of my tradition, we are clearly instructed to work toward a society in which there are "no needy among us." In so many ways, our society fails to live up to this vision. COVID has exacerbated this failure, and the vast inequities that are sustained because of it. In SB 282-1 we have the power to ease some of the harshest consequences faced by Oregonians during this time, through no fault of their own. I urge you to pass this bill.

Thank you,

Rabbi Benjamin Barnett