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RE: Support for SB 282-1

Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development,

We write to you today in strong support of SB 282 with the -1 amendment, much preferred over the -3 amendment, which would extend the grace period of tenants to pay back unpaid rent from the emergency period, and offer other tenant protections.

COVID-19 has had a disastrous impact on the economic well being of hundreds of thousands of people in Oregon. Public health measures that shut down entire industries led to widespread layoffs and pay cuts. This pain has not been felt equally. People working in the service industry, people working lower wage jobs, and people of color have been disproportionately impoverished. Furthermore, steps that individuals took to protect themselves and their families from the virus often led to even greater economic hardship.

Oregon has led the country with a robust eviction moratorium that has helped keep many people housed despite these economic hardships. However, many people have only done so by accumulating an insurmountable amount of rent debt. The only way these renters will be able to stay in their housing is through support that will forgive the rent debt. Today we find ourselves nearly a year since the shutdowns began, less than four months before the end of the eviction moratorium, and with only very small amounts of aid already handed out. We need more time.

SB 282-1 will provide the needed time. One of the most important components of the bill is that it will extend the grace period for paying back any accrued rent since the beginning of the pandemic, giving tenants an additional seven months. For many tenants, this won't be enough time to pay back their rent, especially as so many continue unemployed. But hopefully this will be enough time for federal and state governments to design programs and distribute aid.

Sb 282-1 also offers tenants some relief from a growing phenomenon of harassment. Landlords that are upset because tenants have not paid their rent during the moratorium are increasingly turning to other means to push them out. One common tactic is to file an eviction for other reasons, usually reasons that cannot be well substantiated. By creating the presumption that a landlord in this situation is acting in retaliation, tenants are protected from this behavior. The -3 amendment would do away with this vital protection, which is why PTU strongly favors the -1 amendment instead,

The bills protections for guests and tenant occupants is also important for tenants trying to figure out how to stay off the street. Many tenants that have fallen through the cracks during the pandemic don't have anywhere to go. Making sure that they can stay with friends and relatives will offer much more stability as they seek other housing options.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely destructive in its own right. The policies we implement to protect the most vulnerable can safeguard against an even greater wave of harm. Please move SB 282-1 with a do pass recommendation to protect Oregon's tenants.

Sincerely,
Portland Tenants United Organizing Committee