



June 21, 2023

House Committee on Rules
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 611B. My name is Emily Hawley, and I am a senior policy associate at the ACLU of Oregon. The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,000 supporters statewide.

We urge you to pass SB 611B as a critical homelessness prevention strategy for seniors, families, individuals and communities across the state suffering from rent spikes.

Oregon communities already face a housing emergency: with 42 in every 10,000 Oregonians experiencing homelessness, Oregon has the third highest — and one of the fastest growing — rates of homelessness in the country.¹ This crisis further reflects significant racial equity disparities within our state: American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Black Oregonians are represented among our homeless population over three times more than their share of the state's general population.²

Oregon's homelessness crisis begins far before an individual or family find themselves living unsheltered. Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes. These renters pay the ninth highest rent in the nation. And despite groundbreaking protections lawmakers passed in 2019 with SB 608, many Oregonians have continued to experience extreme and untenable rent increases, placing individuals and families at risk of displacement and homelessness.

When even a \$100 increase in a community's median rents is tied to a 9% increase in homelessness in that community,³ these issues of housing insecurity are inextricably linked to our state's homelessness crisis. With the advent of extreme inflation, renters face an untenable rent increase of 14.6% in 2023 without SB611B.

¹ Nicole Hayden and Jereemy Goldberg, "Oregon's recent growth in homelessness among largest in nation", The Oregonian, April 5, 2023, <https://www.oregonlive.com/politics/2023/04/oregons-recent-growth-in-homelessness-among-largest-in-nation.html>.

² Findings and Recommendations of the Task Force on Homelessness and Racial Disparities in Oregon, January 2022, <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/get-involved/Documents/01-21-2022-Findings-and-Recommendation.pdf>.

³ These findings account for wages, unemployment, poverty, and other demographic and economic factors. How COVID-19 Could Aggravate the Homelessness Crisis?, U.S. Government Accountability Office, August 25, 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/blog/how-covid-19-could-aggravate-homelessness-crisis>.

Countless studies demonstrate that preventative measures to mitigate housing insecurity are far more effective than efforts to respond to homelessness. Intervention during the early stages of housing insecurity – including efforts to check unreasonable rent increases— is vital for reducing rates of homelessness. These early interventions maximize public resources.

Senate Bill 611B provides reasonable and necessary rent stabilization for tenants.

The measure will prevent extreme rent increases and related displacements, while allowing landlords to account for inflation and preserving landlords' and developers' ability to maintain a reasonable profit. It maintains landlord's ability to reset rents in between tenancies, and new properties continue to be exempt from the law, ensuring there is no impact on new development.

SB 611B is a positive step the legislature can take today to have an immediate impact on our state's housing crisis as we also work on the longer term solutions of increasing supply and providing support to rehouse our currently homeless neighbors.

We urge you to swiftly pass SB 611B out of committee. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Emily Hawley

Senior Policy Associate

ACLU of Oregon