

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, Members of the Committee,

My name is Ostin Merkle-Lawler and I currently work for the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) as a tenant education coordinator and I am also a tenant in Oregon, writing to testify in support of SB 799. I and countless others across the state strongly urge you to pass SB 799 as quickly as possible as part of the Homelessness Prevention Package, which includes \$100 million in rent new rent assistance (SB 611 / HB 2733) to limit the exorbitant and abusive rent increases many landlords are imposing, and the Rental Market Data Bill for greater transparency in understanding Oregon's housing availability.

As you may know, according to the state economist, more than 50% of Oregon renters do not have enough money left over for food, medicine, and other basic necessities. When people on the edge get evicted, as we all know, it is all too easy to fall into homelessness. Meanwhile, according to tax returns, even during the Pandemic, the number of Oregonians earning more than \$500,000 jumped more than 11% in 2020 and nearly tripled over the past decade, while COVID-19 caused unemployment that peaked at 14% and left renters without work for long periods of time.

It is clear that this bill is necessary, not only for the general health and safety of Oregonians and our communities, but for meeting the economic conditions of a truly healthy, stable, democratic society. However, as is often the case, I'm sure you will find the opponents to this bill and the rest of these aforementioned bills staking their claim as being treated unfairly by their aims and effects, even by such a modest proposal as this - to ensure tenants, working people, and their families one of the most valuable and finite resources they still have, *time*. I am particularly interested in understanding exactly what they propose we do instead, and where their interests lie - to let increasingly wealthy landlords, lobbyists and their large landholding, out-of-state donors decide and speculate without the public, behind closed doors and in board rooms? In other words, to let this crisis appear as something out of our control? With these proposals, we should say no. It is clear that a failure to act legislatively and decisively now, as proposed, would mean a deeper, needless housing and social crisis.

I am glad to see movement on these proposals being made, and thank you all for pushing these demands forward and working on this. The time for action is now. I remain confident that renters, community allies, and families will continue to make their voices heard and build with one another to hold those in power accountable.

In solidarity,
Ostin Merkle-Lawler
Tenant Education Coordinator
Community Alliance of Tenants