

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ostin Merkle-Lawler and I live in north Portland. I am an Oregon renter and current staff member at the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT), submitting testimony in favor of HB 2001 to help people avoid homelessness and give more people who are living unsheltered the opportunity for safe and stable housing.

Since the COVID-emergency lockdowns in 2020, I (and many of my coworkers who are also Oregon renters) have personally spoken to countless tenants on CAT's renters' rights hotline facing eviction, those who have already been evicted, and those at risk of homelessness across our state. Many have expressed not only the stress and risk to their health under current eviction laws and lack of adequate housing services, but also the negative impact displacement has had upon their neighbors, neighborhood, their families, and their neighbors' families. Many have felt that even with the assistance and information we can provide during this emergency, they are too often falling through the cracks of the system, do not have adequate time to consider their options or get support, and have no way out.

I personally also have some close friends and family who are currently homeless or are struggling to make rent and facing the danger of becoming homeless in the Portland metro area. This is often despite the fact that they work long hours in places far from home, take on multiple jobs, or even sell their possessions to get by. I can certainly say that this has impacted my own views on homelessness and the housing crisis in our state, and the legislative, collective action *necessary* to meet it. I believe HB 2001 has the potential to address the urgency of the crisis many Oregonians are living with due to lack of housing, inadequate services and eviction laws that do not equally represent Oregon tenants, working Oregonians, their families, and wider community stability and health over displacement.

I would strongly urge anyone who considers this and other housing bills to seriously consider and understand how the current laws and systems in place are made for displacement, rather than stability and building stable foundations for healthy and safe communities across our state.

Thank you for hearing this important bill and for considering my testimony. I hope you will listen to people like me and vote yes on HB 2001.