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We believe that everyone deserves to live a life free from violence.

Re: Support for HB 2001 to reduce evictions and prevent homelessness

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today in support of HB 2001. My name is Emmy Ritter and I am the Executive Director of Raphael House of Portland. As advocates for survivors of domestic violence in our community, we urge you to pass HB 2001 as part of the Homelessness Prevention Package.

As a domestic violence agency we provide safety and support services for survivors and have done so since 1977. Besides providing a confidential emergency shelter for these families we have many wrap around services, including supporting survivors with rental assistance and resources to help them maintain their safe housing. These resources have helped over 90% of the families we work with stay safely housed.

Many of these families have just fled abusive partners in order to protect themselves and their children- often at the expense of losing everything; their belongings, friends, family, neighbors, their jobs, and their homes. During this risky time, they undertake the monumental task of rebuilding their lives – including their income. They are constantly making the impossible choice-what necessity will they need to forgo to continue supporting themselves and their family; will it be food, medical needs, electricity, school needs for their children, or the rent.

A recent report by Forbes Home stated that Oregonians are spending more of our income on rent than most other renters in the US, ranking 9th in the nation.

With housing and living costs as they are- with 14% rent increases- we cannot expect survivors escaping violence to quickly come up with money outside of their well-planned, tight budgets when they receive a notice of eviction.

Increasingly, survivors have been coming to us, panicked, after missing a month's rent or receiving 72-hour eviction notices. We have been fortunate to have access to essential direct client assistance funds that help us bridge through this crisis, and threat of being thrown out of their new home.

HB 2001 will reinstate the increased time between nonpayment notice and eviction court from 72 hours to 10 days to give people time to access assistance. HB 2001 will reinstate the “right to redemption,” also known as “pay to stay,” so that landlords cannot refuse payment at any point before a final court judgment. The negotiated compromise language deletes the safe harbor pause on the process while a rent assistance application is pending, but retains critical elements of the initial proposal that will help preserve housing stability while making it more likely that rent assistance payments will reach landlords.

Our advocates tell me that property managers are refusing to wait even when we can promise them agency funds, or the State distributed emergency rental assistance. They do not take into account the many steps, and time, it takes to administer rental checks. What this looks like now- after a survivor contacts us panicking- advocates call the landlord, then contact and confirm the funding source, they call the landlords again, all along providing unsure reassurance to the survivor. Next they need to attend to agency procedures- including tracking down check signers. Ultimately advocates finally end up driving rent checks to the farthest parts of Multnomah County to meet this short deadline. This is an inefficient and expensive way to use a non-profit’s limited capacity and an intensely traumatizing process for survivors of domestic violence.

Keeping people housed not only allows people to lift themselves out of poverty and crisis but it is far less expensive for us as a community than allowing homelessness. Reducing evictions is an essential part of our housing and homelessness response.

HB 2001 will:

- Reduce nonpayment evictions and make the eviction process more fair.
- Expands time after notice to make payments before being taken to court to 10 days instead of 72 hours.
- Makes reasonable modifications to the nonpayment eviction court timeline to ensure that if a tenant makes a payment before the judgment is entered, the case will be dismissed. This allows landlord to get paid and tenants to avoid homelessness..

We must make evictions rare and when they do happen, more fair.

HB 2001 Sections 14-26 is a fair approach that gives survivors who are behind on their rent a reasonable amount of time to catch up and, if they need it, locate, apply and receive rent assistance. HB 2001 is cost effective for landlords, nonprofits, and ultimately for our community.

Thank you,

Emmy Ritter
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