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House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
Testimony in Support of HB 2001-1
February 14, 2023

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

My name is Becky Straus and I am the Managing Attorney of Oregon Law Center's Eviction Defense Project, which is a joint program of OLC, Legal Aid Services of Oregon and Center for Nonprofit Legal Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2001 with the Dash 1 amendment.

As you know, the Eviction Defense Project provides free legal help to low-income tenants who are facing eviction in every county across the state. We also watch the eviction filings daily and have aggregated a large amount of data about eviction rates, types, details and outcomes.

We have witnessed the stark difference between an eviction process resourced with rent assistance, legal assistance and time in the system to connect with each, and one without these core elements of a functioning homelessness prevention system.

Beginning in July 2022, tenants could no longer access the Safe Harbor in SB 891, meaning that the pause for tenants with pending rental assistance applications was no longer available. In October 2022, those "safe harbor" cases that were grandfathered in and held through September also sped up again to eviction, if the rent assistance had not been paid. These sunsets and the expiration of the remaining protections from the pandemic ushered in a spike of eviction filings. Today we are well over pre-pandemic levels.

When the Safe Harbor was available, 80% of the 2,000+ tenants who accessed it in court ultimately stayed in their housing. By contrast, compared to those months when protections were in place, the number of tenants forced into moveout agreements in court have now nearly tripled. Very clearly, when protections were in place, tenants in eviction court were more likely than not to stay in their home. In the absence of protections, tenants in eviction court are more likely than not to lose their home.

I want to draw your attention to a few statements in OLIS that highlight individual tenant stories:
- Hai-Lea Eads was evicted last month from her home in Eugene. After trying for some time, she was finally able to connect to available rent assistance resources after her court case was filed. The rent assistance group was going to pay her entire balance as well as three months' forward rent, but she was forced out anyway because her landlord refused to take the money. Hai-Lea is now without housing, doubling up with a friend. HB 2001-1 would keep Hai-Lea in her home and make landlords whole.

- Very similar story for Joe Shonbrun, from Portland, who tried for a long time to find available rent assistance, only to be refused by his landlord when he did actually connect with resources. The rent assistance he found was going to pay his rent owed plus three months' future rent, but his landlord refused to take it and forced him into an eviction. Since Christmas, Joe has been homeless and has been going to numerous hotels and AirBnB's when he can afford it but has had to sleep in his car when he can't. HB 2001-1 would have kept Joe stably housed.
- Jacob Lundahl was evicted a few months ago from his home in Corvallis. Jacob and his girlfriend had not lived in the unit for quite some time before their landlord filed the eviction and his landlord knew as much. Jacob got a default judgment against him, even though having vacated the unit is an absolute defense to an eviction. With an eviction judgment on his record, Jacob is now homeless and struggling to survive while searching for safe and stable options. HB 2001-1 would have protected housing stability for Jacob because it puts in place a safeguard to prevent evictions where the tenant has vacated.

Oregon can have an eviction process that values housing stability and that gives tenants a fair chance to connect with resources and assistance when they need it. HB 2001-1 proposes a way forward for this critical arm of a statewide homelessness prevention system. We urge your support.

Thank you.