

Submitter: Steven Essig

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure: SB611

I critically support SB611 as harm reductive legislation that helps working families stay housed without being subjected to exorbitant & unpredictable pricing increases. Working families should not be made to suffer for non-working landlords to maintain their unsustainable, comfy low-risk asset investment on something that is required to survive & is supposed to be a human right. State lawmakers must take action to reduce high-rent homelessness by passing SB 611.

SB 611 is part of the Homelessness Prevention Package. It sets reasonable, predictable rent increases for tenants. Setting limits to rent increases to 3% + inflation with maximum increase of 8% during a calendar year is a compromise in the grand scheme of the housing crisis. This compromise is still a much better reform to the general failure to respond to housing than the unpredictable & ridiculous 14% increase made up.

SB611 narrows the loophole, applying rent stabilization to buildings older than 3 years, which increases the number of people protected while exempting new construction. Again, a compromise considering the climate disasters that have still wreaked havoc to large swaths of the Southern Oregon region -- all people should be given the same decreased rent caps, and public housing should be made a top level priority. The high rental prices & low supply are not a new phenomenon, yet we still haven't seen affordable low-income public development be favored over failing privatization that thrives on profit over people.

SB611 increases relocation assistance to three-months' rent to help tenants displaced through no fault of their own avoid homelessness. Landlord dependents with four units or less are exempt from this provision.

SB611 still, compromisingly, sets no limits on rent resets between tenants.

When families in our state already pay some of the highest rents in the country, the current allowable rent increases of 14.6% are obviously too high. Very few people in Oregon - including people who work in the state legislature - could afford such an extreme rent increase. The current law also has a huge loophole that allows unlimited rent increases for many buildings and landlords have been exploiting that loophole. Rent increases of 32%, 50% or more are becoming more common, according to media reports.

And when tenants get "no-fault" evicted because their landlord wants to move in or

has sold the property, they are at risk of homelessness without adequate relocation assistance. Imagine losing your home through no fault of your own and having to find a new rental with Oregon's low availability and high rents.

Too many people in our communities are one missed paycheck, high healthcare bill or other setback away from losing their homes, and extreme rent increases are driving people out of their homes. Furthermore, already vulnerable Oregonians are still struggling to be whole again after the pandemic. Today more than 86% of all court evictions are due to a missed rent payment. The situation is more serious for Black Oregonians, who are 30% less likely to be homeowners and more likely to be renters due to the legacy of historic policies that blocked them from purchasing and owning property.

Please commit to supporting SB 611.

Sincerely,
Steven Essig
Ashland, OR resident & community frontline worker