

Members of the committee, my name is Claire Contreras, and I am here to testify in support of SB611.

As a healthcare worker, and particularly as a public health and emergency room nurse, this bill is especially urgent for me. Witnessing the manifestations of the worsening housing crisis over the last 5 years in the healthcare system has been nothing short of devastating. Everyday emergency rooms across the state fill during evening and night time hours with people seeking a safe place out of the cold and the wet to close their eyes for a few hours. A place where their belongings are safe, where their bodies and small number of possessions are not vulnerable to theft or assault.

Furthermore, when families are deep in the throes of housing instability, there is little room to focus on health: there is little room to devote to spending hours on hold with specialists offices trying to schedule follow ups and referrals. There is little room to store scores of medications and organize them in a way where you can remember to take them more than once a day. There is little room for wellness checks and the healthcare maintenance that communities so badly need to live long, healthy and happy lives. Low income families are hit especially hard by these increases. With the scaling back of SNAP benefits they have even less money to devote to rent than they did before making them even more vulnerable to eviction and homelessness.

Housing costs also impact providers. St. Charles hospital in Bend has struggled to recruit full time nurses because the cost of housing and rent in that community has become so high it is nearly impossible for those workers to live there. I have seen this reality play out in my personal life. One of my closest friends and former colleagues is a medical assistant trying to pay her way through community college to get a bachelor's degree in a medical specialty. She makes \$23/hour and works full time as a medical assistant at a local substance use treatment facility. She receives a small amount of financial aid and attends classes part time. She lived with my husband and I for a month last year when she was between apartments because of the uphill battle of finding a studio apartment for less than \$1200/month. We spent many nights together in my living room as tears rolled down her cheeks because the incongruous nature of her earnings and of rents in the Portland area are such that she would have to devote 50% of her monthly income to rent and most landlords want proof that your income is at least 3x the rent. Most low income housing would not accept her as an applicant because she was a student. Nightly she considered dropping out of school so that she could qualify for low income housing or work more to make rent.

A refrain that seems to resonate with business owners, share holders and the high income earners in our society is a utopia in which no one lives on the streets, where the remnants of people's belongings must not be stepped over to enter the foyers of small boutiques. To inhabit a future where homelessness is not a public health crisis and where communities can reclaim their sidewalks please consider passing SB611 that will slow rent increases, reduce evictions, give folks facing eviction more resources to find their next shelter and offer families the time, shelter and space they need to take care of each other.