

Submitter: Margot Black

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure: HB3503

My name is Margot Black. I am renter, a data analyst, and a tenant rights advocate who has been working directly with renters in the metro area for the last eight years in multiple capacities, including eviction court support. I am testifying in SUPPORT of House Bill 3503 to lift the local ban on rent control.

The ban, passed in the early 80s during a nationwide propaganda campaign bankrolled by ALEC, was never good policy. Our sea of tent cities is an example of how well this ban has been “working” for the last 40 years.

In my work, I have personally witnessed folks moving from their long-time homes into their cars, friend’s couches, and shelters – often with their children – for literally no other reason than the rent had increased beyond what they could hustle for each month. I have seen people – primarily from communities of color – lose everything because no matter how many times we called 211, just \$600 of emergency rent assistance couldn’t be manifested.

And here’s what is chilling. Once a household is priced out of stable housing, the battle is lost. It takes years to get back in, and many never can. One of the more tragic eviction hearings I attended involved a single mother working full time and doing gig work to keep up with the rent that she’d once been able to afford. The rent would always get paid, but later and later each month, which meant \$150 late rent fees also compounded her balance. She agreed to move-out to avoid the eviction and moved herself and daughter to a friend’s living room futon. The plan was to get back on her feet asap and get back into an apartment. We lost track of each other until she called me almost 2 years later, from under the Burnside bridge, where she was wondering if I knew of any resources to prevent her and her daughter from spending their first night outdoors. Eviction court to couch or car to viaduct is not an anomaly, it is a well trod highway.

Rent increases aren’t dictated by the laws of physics. They are determined by profit optimizing algorithms, greed and an industry that literally celebrates low-vacancy rates because it means more money for them. Imagine our utility providers being allowed to increase rates at the same pace as landlords as a condition of doing business? We don’t allow that, and yet, utility providers aren’t fleeing the market. What we do allow, is rates to be regulated by local jurisdictions. Housing is a utility, and should be treated as such.

Rent control isn't a silver bullet, but it's a critical part of the solution. Statewide rent caps set by SB608 were not intended to stabilize rents, but as a backstop to landlords trying to get a tenant out without a no-cause eviction. Unless the legislature lets local jurisdictions develop their own tools, this is on Salem and it's something the legislature will need to revisit year after year with one-size-fits-all non-solutions until you let localities work with local stakeholders to develop local policies that make sense for the local market.