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

Re: Support for SB 722

Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of SB 722, which will help prevent displacement and extreme rent spikes by extending coverage of our state's rent stabilization statutes, and prohibiting the use of price-fixing software to inflate rents. Access to stable and affordable housing is one of the biggest challenges for victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence seeking safety and fleeing abuse.

As a Domestic Violence agency, Raphael House of Portland has been providing safety and supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their children since 1977. Beyond providing a confidential emergency shelter for these families, we also offer wrap-around services for as long as they need — including dedicated housing support, designed to help survivors reduce barriers and overcome challenges and safety concerns associated with moving into their new homes.

Preserving housing stability is essential for all survivors of sexual and domestic violence in Oregon. Recent studies have highlighted a significant correlation between housing cost burdens, instability or homelessness, and an increased risk of experiencing domestic or sexual violence. There are currently more than 2,000 eviction filings per month in Oregon, 88% of which are due to cost burdens and inability to pay. We hear every day from survivors whose stability and security are at risk due to lack of housing affordability.

As our state's housing crisis has escalated, our network of domestic and sexual violence shelters have been particularly impacted. Survivors fleeing violence have fewer places they can afford to go, and are therefore more reliant on the shelter network. Survivors in shelter are forced to stay longer, as it is harder to find affordable safe places to move to, whether transitional or permanent housing. This means shelters have less space to offer survivors fleeing.

The lack of safe, stable, and affordable housing can also trap individuals in abusive relationships, as the absence of alternative accommodations may force them to remain with their abusers. Additionally, individuals facing unstable housing situations are more vulnerable to various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, psychological, and financial abuse.

Furthermore, a recent study indicated that domestic violence was the cause for 49% of women experiencing homelessness in Oregon and Washington. Homelessness is a risk factor for experiencing rape or sexual assault, with homeless individuals facing disproportionately high rates of sexual violence. Studies show that just a \$100 increase in median rents in a community

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is tied to a 9% increase in homelessness in that community. At a time when Oregon is experiencing some of the highest rates of homelessness in the nation, we cannot afford to let rent spikes go unchecked.

For these reasons, advocates for survivors of domestic and sexual violence are seeking more support for their shelter and emergency services, but are also prioritizing advocacy for long-term, systemic housing policy changes that would better support survivors and prevent homelessness. It is this perspective that brings us to support SB 722.

SB 722 will provide important improvements to Oregon's current rent stabilization statutes that will help prevent against extreme rent spikes and inflated rents, thereby protecting housing stability for survivors.

SB 722 is the only policy tool on the table this session that would provide immediate and measurable protection for Oregonians suffering due to rent spikes as a result of our state's affordable housing crisis. These proposed changes strike a balance between continuing to encourage new units to come into the market and ensuring that those units do not contribute to long-term gentrification and price inflation. It would also help to ensure that survivors never have to make the impossible choice between becoming homeless or returning to an abuser.

For all of these reasons, we urge your strong support of this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Oregon communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emmy Ritter', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Emmy Ritter, MSW
Executive Director
Raphael House of Portland