



Senate Committee on Housing & Development

Testimony in Support of SB 54

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AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50+ to choose how they live as they age. AARP Oregon advocates on issues important to our 500,000 Oregon members with a focus on health security, financial resilience and livable communities.

AARP supports SB 54 and amendments under consideration. Older Oregonians face significant and heightened risks to their health and their safety when we have extreme temperatures. According to HealthinAging.org, every summer, more than 600 Americans die of health problems caused by excessive heat and humidity. Research has shown that prolonged exposure to high temperatures can lead to severe health issues, including heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and exacerbation of existing medical conditions. Older adults and individuals with chronic medical conditions are at high risk of developing heat-related illnesses, because of aging-related physical changes in the body, including an inability to regulate body temperature, chronic health conditions, and even effects of taking some medications.

Here in Oregon in recent years, the change in our summers has had devastating effects on older Oregonians. According to news accounts – in 2021, the region experienced record-shattering heat that, by the end of summer, killed 72 people in Multnomah County — with all but three of those deaths resulting from a single five-day heat wave in June. Of those who died, 78% were 60 or older; 71% lived alone. And more recently, during the July 2024 heat wave, according to news accounts and the state medical examiner's office, 17 people died due to suspected issues related to the heat. All but two of the deaths were people over the age of 50, and most of them were in their 70s or 80s.

We need to recognize that extreme temperatures are part of our reality, and we must take efforts to protect communities from risk. The lack of indoor cooling can also have profound economic and social impacts. High medical costs associated with heat-related illnesses, increased mortality rates, and the strain on emergency services are just a few examples. Older Oregonians, low-income families and marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by extreme heat. By passing this legislation, we can help bridge the gap and ensure that all residents, regardless of their age and socioeconomic status, have the right to a safe and healthy living environment.

AARP strongly supports SB 54 with amendments. Providing indoor cooling for residential tenants is a necessary step to protect the health and well-being of our most vulnerable populations.