

OREGON PSR

PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

March 24, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Housing and Development

Subject: Support SB 54

Dear Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee on Housing and Development,

I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas. I am an environmental health scientist with a career in public health. I am testifying today on behalf of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility in support of SB 54. We are an organization of over 2,000 health professionals and public health advocates working to address the gravest threats to human health and survival.

Senate Bill 54 requires landlords of more than 10 dwelling units to provide cooling if outside temperatures reach over 80 degrees fahrenheit. It is important now, more than ever, that Oregonians have access to cooling as the climate crisis worsens and intensifies, and heat waves increase.

We know that excessive heat affects everyone, has wide ranging health impacts and can worsen health risks for people with chronic health conditions, especially low income and communities of color who experience higher rates of chronic health conditions.

During the 2021 Heat Dome lack of air conditioning was a key driver in mortality. We also know that exposure to consecutive days of heat with limited overnight cooling is a main factor that makes people more susceptible to heat-related illness. Outdoor workers, for example, are at high risk of serious illness if they are not able to cool down sufficiently before returning to work. Failure to cool down, especially in persons not properly acclimated, has resulted in serious illness and death.

Furthermore, it was noted in Multnomah County's report on the Health Impacts of Excessive Heat Events that 25% of deaths during the 2021 heat dome were in persons living in single-family homes. It would therefore be a good idea in future to extend this requirement of landlords to provide cooling to rentals with fewer units, including single family homes.

We believe that we must prevent what we cannot cure and this bill is a first step to prevention. Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility strongly urges you to pass SB 54 out of committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Theodora Tsongas, PhD, MS

Healthy Climate Action Team Member

