

Testimony on SB 608  
Christopher Lowe  
Senate Housing Committee, Feb 4, 2018

My name is Christopher Lowe. I rent half of a duplex in Portland. My landlord owns less than 5 rental properties, so none of the protective features of this bill would apply to me, although some of its potentially punitive features might. A reported possible amendment to override Portland's excellent relocation assistance ordinance certainly would increase my vulnerability.

On specific aspects of the bill, I appreciate the effort to stabilize and limit rent increases around the state. I applaud the principle of statewide renter protection. But allowing effectively 9% to 11% annual increases still will cause wide displacement and expanded houselessness, since working class incomes are rising at nothing close to that rate. And the failure lift the pre-emption on local rent caps and other protective measures is unacceptable.

I appreciate some of the restrictions on no cause evictions, which will protect some people. But the exceptions are far too wide, and too easily subject to landlord manipulation.

The provision to allow "for cause" eviction based on three warnings of lease violations by a landlord, without any standards relating to the seriousness of violations or truth of the warnings, and no process of appeal, is simply outrageous as far as I am concerned.

But I will not go deeper into those issues. First, I believe that the bill is based on the wrong principle. It does not recognize the fundamental human right to safe and secure housing. Hence it fails in the legislature's duty to secure to the people their fundamental rights and conditions for their well-being.

Speaker Kotek recently said: "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." With SB 608, that's not at issue. I say, "Don't let the inadequate be the enemy of the good."

Secondly, I understand that this bill was allowed to be heard at all only on the condition that it not be amended, based on discussions that included landlords and their lobbyists, but no tenants nor tenant advocates, such as Portland Tenants United, to which I belong. This is an anti-democratic railroading process. I object strenuously. Since the powers behind it are not on this committee, some of you may be frustrated by it too.

So I want to testify that the renter's rights movement is not going away. This bill is not remotely

close to settling the issues it addresses. We will continue organizing to bring about further change. We are not intimidated by the power exercise of allowing only show hearing. We will be back.