



**Urban League**  
of Portland

February 15, 2019

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chair Noble, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the Urban League of Portland in support of Senate Bill 608. SB608 would provide critical protections against the financial hardship, displacement, and homelessness that follow no-cause and economic evictions.

The Urban League of Portland is a nonprofit civil rights, direct service, and advocacy organization that serves all of Oregon. Our mission is to empower African American and other Oregonians to achieve equality in education, employment, and economic security. Since 2015, we've operated a housing program that now serves 450 households annually through a combination of eviction prevention, permanent supportive housing, and rapid rehousing services.

Housing has always been a civil rights issue. It was the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr.'s tireless advocacy and sudden death that led President Johnson to pass the Fair Housing Act in 1968. A half-century has lapsed since the act's passage and we continue to see housing inequities in Oregon. There is a clear-cut need for more solutions.

The Fair Housing Council of Oregon's 2018 audit of housing discrimination found that providers continue to treat applicants differently based on their perceived race or national origin. Housing opportunity for Oregonians of color is all the more disquieting when you consider that the trend of rising rents and stagnant wages hits those with the lowest median incomes—African American, Latinx, and Native households—the hardest. Indeed, Black households can no longer afford rent anywhere in Oregon's largest city; the 2018 State of Housing report from the Portland Housing Bureau again found that the typical African American household cannot afford rent in any Portland neighborhood without exposing itself to severe rent burden.

These facts provide a snapshot of the 450 households the Urban League serves. For a more personal account of Oregon's renter crisis, I would like to share the story of Preston Owens. Mr Owens resided at 59th and SE Gladstone for nine years. He receives a modest monthly income from his disability check. At \$400 per month, this SE Portland home allowed Owens and his housemates to afford other basic necessities like medication that Owens takes for a chronic condition. Unfortunately, Owens received a no-cause eviction in October of 2018, at which point he came to the Urban League out of uncertainty about what to do next. Our housing staff were able to find Mr. Owens a unit for \$800 a month, a rare find in Portland, but well over his monthly disability check. He is in that home for now, looking for more affordable options and waiting on affordable housing waitlists in hopes of finding a place (now with the additional barrier of an eviction on his record) where he can afford necessities like food, transportation, and medication again.

This is a devastating, but perhaps not surprising anecdote. Landlords will can capitalize on the legal privileges available to them. At the Urban League, we see it used to get rid of tenants on fixed incomes



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like Preston Owens, tenants of different cultural backgrounds, tenants who request repairs, tenants who were victims of crimes in their own homes, and more. Tenants deserve ample notice, a legitimate reason, and the opportunity for due process before losing something as foundational as housing.

SB 608 would provide tenants with those baseline safeguards against displacement. It eliminates the threat of no-cause evictions for stable tenants. It requires landlords to give tenants more time to budget and plan for rent increases, and provides some tenants with crucial financial support if they do have to move unexpectedly. The 7% plus Consumer Price Index standard for rent increases, while still higher than most Oregonians' yearly wage increases, will create predictability for vulnerable tenants. Tenants deserve at least this amount of certainty and accountability from housing providers.

I respectfully urge you to vote yes on SB 608.

Sincerely,  
Hannah Holloway  
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