

From: [Anthony Bencivengo](#)
To: [HHS Exhibits](#)
Subject: Testimony on SB 608
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To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing
RE: SB 608

Dear Representatives,

Throughout Oregon, tenants like myself and those my organization works with live in fear of rent increases and no-cause evictions. It is imperative that we pass strong rent control measures and protections against no-cause evictions. In doing so, it is important to recognize this law may become a model for rent stabilization measures in other states. That responsibility should be taken seriously. Just as the many positive aspects of this law can become a model for other states, so can its many toxic loopholes and weaknesses. Those loopholes and weaknesses were inserted into the bill by the corporate landlord lobby, with the full intention of enabling landlords to exploit, abuse and displace tenants for the sake of profit. The bill's flaws can and must be corrected if SB 608 is to achieve its vital mission.

There are many badly needed reforms in SB 608: A statewide cap on rent increases to combat price-gouging like the 100% rent increase at the Normandy Apartments which displaced over 1 in 20 Rigler Elementary students. Vacancy control to disincentivize landlords from trying to drive tenants into self-eviction so they can raise rents for the next tenant (as often happens in vacancy decontrolled cities such as New York and San Francisco). A just-cause evictions standard to protect tenants from no-cause evictions, which landlords often use to discriminate or retaliate against tenants in ways which would otherwise be illegal. And for cases where landlords do evict a tenant for reasons that are not the tenant's fault, a requirement the landlord pay for the cost of displacement.

Unfortunately, the influence of the corporate landlord lobby riddled SB 608 with loopholes. There are too many to discuss in detail in this testimony, though you can read Portland Tenants United's full analysis of the bill at <https://medium.com/@ptu/senate-bill-608-c87a76a76650>.

I particularly want to draw the Committee's attention to two landlord-friendly loopholes which could actively make life worse for many of the most vulnerable tenants if they are not fixed:

(1) The "eviction bonus"

There should be zero exemptions to vacancy control. Period. The landlord lobby loves to claim that an "unintended consequence" of rent control is landlords leaving their buildings to rot. First, that is actually an INTENDED consequence of corporate politicians consistently underfunding housing inspectors at the behest of powerful slumlords. Second, landlords actually leave buildings to rot as a way of making tenants' lives so miserable that they "voluntarily" move out, enabling landlords to remodel buildings and dramatically raise the rent before

the next tenant moves in. The New York Times has published extensive exposes on these practices, including on how Donald Trump frequently used the practice to try to force elderly tenants out of rent-controlled units in his buildings. Vacancy control removes the "eviction bonus" which incentivizes this behavior in the first place. This is why it is imperative there be no exemptions to vacancy control in SB 608. Unfortunately, under the current version vacancy control applies only to no-cause evictions which are NOT for having three lease violations in a year (see below) or for a qualifying landlord reason. Landlords should not be allowed to raise the rent beyond SB 608's annual cap during ANY change in tenancy.

(2) The "three strikes" loophole

The current draft of SB 608 allows a landlord to no-cause evict (through refusing to renew the lease) any tenant who has been given three or more "lease violation warnings" in the past year - even if the tenant corrects the problems! Already, far too many landlords threaten to evict tenants over minor lease violations such as keeping "clutter" like a plant or a bike on a balcony, or for having a messy house ("failing to maintain the unit to standards"), or for any number of minor or made-up charges. My last lease, for example, empowered the landlord to give me a violation for not watering the lawn enough - when I was the one paying for the water! Eviction threats over such minor violations are typically used to discriminate or retaliate against tenants in ways which would otherwise be illegal. This provision in SB 608 would actively incentivize such harassment by landlords, as it would give them an avenue to no-cause evict tenants who would otherwise be protected.

In summary: Portland Tenants United strongly supports the tenant protections SB 608 claims to provide. But because the current law is so riddled with loopholes, in practice it will leave many of the most vulnerable tenants unprotected and could incentivize further landlord harassment. These loopholes exist because the landlord lobby put them there. Tenants are demanding the toxic loopholes be removed, so that SB 608 can be strengthened, passed, and carry out its urgent mission of protecting us from landlord exploitation.

Thank you for your consideration,

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