

ROGUE ACTION CENTER

February 15, 2019

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

My name is Michelle Glass and I live in Talent Oregon. I am the Director of the Rogue Action Center, a community-based organization that works on housing affordability in Jackson and Josephine Counties.

Over the last year, the Rogue Action Center has knocked 2,200 doors in Jackson and Josephine Counties to talk to renters about their experiences with housing and to hear from our community about what needs to be done. By far the top issues we hear consistently, whether we're talking to people in Grants Pass, Medford, Phoenix, Talent, or Ashland, are no cause evictions and unreasonable rent increases. Senate Bill 608 is a critical first step toward stabilizing the rental market for the seniors, families, and working people we talk to every day.

In the Medford Metro region, which covers most of Jackson County, nearly half of households rent their homes (48%) and 1 in 3 renters right now are paying more than 50% of income on housing. This leaves very little, and in the case of people living on a fixed income, often no money for other necessities such as food, utilities, or prescriptions. The impact on families can be seen in the 25% of children in Jackson County who are food insecure, and in the fact that the Medford School District had the 2nd highest number of homeless students in the state. In fact, 3,400 students in Jackson and Josephine Counties were homeless last year, according to the most recent report by the Oregon Dept of Education.

Housing is widely recognized as a root cause of many critical issues in Southern Oregon, which is why it was prioritized as the #2 issue impacting the health and well-being of our community in the recently released Jackson and Josephine County joint Community Health Assessment, conducted by local coordinated care organizations, and hospitals.

Some people ask whether we should pass rent stabilization and just cause legislation. If we have learned anything over the last two years since the legislature failed to pass similar legislation, it is that the market cannot and will not solve the housing crisis on its own. Many families in Southern Oregon are now sleeping in cars, on couches, or without shelter as a result. A wait and see approach is not working. We know that we must do many things at once, at the local and at the state level if we are going to get a handle on this growing issue.

Community members in Southern Oregon are mobilizing in support of local housing solutions, contacting elected leaders and filling city council chambers, and local leaders are responding. Medford voted unanimously to pass a construction excise tax to fund affordable housing. Talent is holding study sessions on affordable housing policy tools like inclusionary zoning and a construction excise tax and is looking at code and zoning changes that could incentivize housing development. Ashland, Medford, and Grants Pass are all seriously looking at ways to expand shelter options for the unhoused in our communities. We at the local level are doing all we can to address this crisis, and we can't do it alone. We need the state legislature to act this session.

While we're waiting on new housing stock, and especially affordable and workforce options, the 1 in 2 Jackson County households who rent need some basic stability. SB608 is a compromise bill that is designed to provide some baseline stability while other more long-term interventions have a chance to work. And stabilizing rents

could also make new housing that comes onto the market in 3 or 5 years more effective because the market rent for those new units will more likely be within reach of families in Oregon who need them.

I urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 608, and to pass it out of committee as introduced. This is one important step of many we must take together until everyone in our state has a safe, stable home.

Thank you for listening to community voices across Oregon and for your service on the Senate Housing Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Glass". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Glass, Director