

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

My name is Laura Cuccia-Nilsen and I live in Elmira, OR. It is my belief that Oregon is indeed facing a housing crisis and we need to help make sure that everyone has a safe, stable, affordable place to call home. In every community in our state, there are residents who struggle to make ends meet. They are often forced to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table. Hardworking people should be able to afford housing and still have enough money for groceries and other basic necessities and children deserve an opportunity to succeed in school and life, which is tied to having a stable home.

We need to remove the barriers that Oregonians with low incomes face in finding housing they can afford, close to work and schools, and SB 608 offers a positive step towards this goal while also addressing some of the concerns raised by landlords.

In the spring of 2017 my partner and I were displaced from our home in the small coastal community of Netarts, in Tillamook County. We loved our community there, surrounded by the natural beauty of the Oregon coast, Netarts has a small local population and many visitors throughout the spring and summer. As safety issues with the residence came to our attention and were shared with the property management, it became clear that the property owner had no intention of upholding their responsibilities under current Oregon law to provide a safe residence. Instead, the landlord who lived out of state, took advantage of the housing crisis knowing that tenants had very few options and would be willing to tolerate abuse rather than face homelessness.

When we exercised our tenant rights and made clear that we would not tolerate the unsafe conditions, our landlord gave us a no-cause eviction notice. Rather than face eviction court where the burden of proof of injustice was a practically impossible feat, we took our chances on the road and left our community and depended on our vehicle for shelter and stayed with supportive strangers that we met through the internet.

We came to Eugene in the hopes of finding a stable home and we were fortunate to be supported by many members of the Eugene community. Within a few months, we were able to find a home to rent in Elmira and work opportunities nearby. Meanwhile, back in Netarts, the home we had left out of concern for our safety, was immediately rented, without any repairs made, to another tenant. They were desperate enough to find affordable housing that they were willing to put their health and safety at risk, all while the out of state landlord pulled in a profit and shirked their responsibility under current Oregon law.

Having a stable home in Elmira has made an enormous difference in our lives. We were able to pursue long-term work opportunities because we could depend on having a place to live in the community. We were able to breathe easier without the anxiety and burden of not knowing if we would be able to stay in our home and not knowing if the laws designed to protect us would have any power to do so. We now have refuge from the cold and wet of winter, and are starting to heal from the respiratory effects of exposure to mold and the financial burden of instability. We are able to keep our belongings safe and actually start building our savings. We have peace of mind knowing that the responsibilities we take as renters are finally being matched by the responsibilities taken by our current landlords.

The current law is failing low-income residents and we are in crisis. People who rent their homes are depending on the Legislature to act to provide basic protections and stability. We know we need to

address a range of issues to solve the housing problems our communities are facing, and it is critical the Legislature act now to pass SB 608. Please vote yes on SB 608.

It is imperative that we as a community take action to address this issue. While SB 604 may not be perfect for everyone in every situation, it is a step towards alleviating serious abuses happening to hardworking renters facing very tough conditions.

We are good tenants and responsible people, and we got a no-cause termination notice because we asked for repairs. Lack of housing pushed us out of our community and into uncertainty. Thankfully we were lucky enough to find a new home and community, but many, many Oregon families are not so lucky and desperately need support and action.

Thank you for your service as a legislator and for reading my letter. I know how hard your work is and I appreciate your time considering this issue and my perspective.

Laura Cuccia-Nilsen
Elmira, OR